



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Dominican activists challenge Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (Fourteenth of June Movement), 1959-1960

Time period notes: *The campaign lasted about a year and a half. It began to disintegrate after the arrest and murder of its leaders.*

June

1959

to: December

1960

Country: Dominican Republic

Location Description: *Throughout the Dominican Republic*

Goals:

To end the military dictatorship and establish a democratic government.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 033. Fraternalization

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 033. Fraternalization

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 033. Fraternalization
- 049. Camouflaged meetings of protest

Methods in 4th segment:

- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 033. Fraternalization
- 049. Camouflaged meetings of protest
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 151. Changes in diplomatic and other representation

Methods in 5th segment:

- 033. Fraternalization
- 049. Camouflaged meetings of protest
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance

Methods in 6th segment:

- 096. International trade embargo
- 154. Severance of diplomatic relations

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches

Notes on Methods:

Acceptance of torture- although activists did not seek to be tortured, they were aware that their actions would inevitably lead to them. Women and young activists were subjected to cruel torture, and they faced such actions in a dignified and resilient manner. The torture of civilians outraged the population and created more support for the campaign.

Recruitment of opponents' families- Members of the movement also sought to recruit the sons and daughters of those allied with the regime. Consequently, many members of the regime were reluctant to act against the entire population.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Citizens from different socioeconomic classes throughout the Dominican Republic. Most participants were middle-class youth

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Manuel Tavárez, Leandro Guzman, Minerva Mirabal, Patria Mirabal, and Maria Teresa Mirabal.

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

The OAS member countries, the Catholic Church, and Romulo Betancourt (Venezuela's president at the time).

Involvement of social elites:

Most of the leaders of the movement came from elite backgrounds.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Initial organizers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Young activists and other members of the population

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Young activists and other members of the population

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Catholic Church
- OAS Member States

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 3 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The military dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None known

Campaigner violence:

None known. Although some members and leaders of the Fourth of June movement intended to acquire weapons, they never obtained a significant amount. They also never used the few weapons that they possessed.

Repressive Violence:

The government repeatedly used violent tactics against its opponents and political dissidents. There were countless cases of torture, rape, beatings, and assassinations perpetuated by the military.

Most dissidents were either killed or imprisoned. Political prisoners lived in infamous conditions. They were often left naked in prison cells with little food and no sanitary conditions. Many were tortured on electric chairs and forced to watch their friends being tortured as well.

The military often pressured activists by threatening their families, and in some cases even murdered the family members of their opponents.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Success in achieving goals: 1. The campaign did not achieve its objective of removing the military regime and establishing

democracy. Although the campaign did inspire those who murdered Trujillo, the assassination did not lead to the immediate development of a democratic regime. In fact, Trujillo's cronies continued to be in control of the Dominican Republic for many more years. However, part of the campaign's goal was the removal of Trujillo from power, so even though violence was used there was some limited success.

Survival: .5. The organization began to disintegrate as its leaders were killed or imprisoned. In addition, the Fourteenth of June movement changed its form as it began to adopt more belligerent tactics.

Growth: 3. The campaign against Trujillo grew to encompass every region of the country. As the regime's repression increased more groups and individuals began to oppose the government.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic from the moment he won the fraudulent elections of 1930, up until his assassination in 1961. Through his more than thirty-year rule, Trujillo demanded strict obedience from all Dominicans, and had no qualms in using repressive actions to force compliance or eliminate dissent. In fact, Trujillo and his regime were accountable for more than 50,000 deaths.

Many different attempts were made against Trujillo's life, although for many years most of the population acquiesced or supported the regime and its policies. The dictatorship had a very extensive coercive network, and the government used spies to keep the population in check. Nonetheless, in January of 1959 a few elite activists decided to forge a resistance campaign to end the dictatorship. Manuel Tavárez, Leandro Guzman, and the three Mirabal sisters: Minerva, Maria Teresa, and Patria, were some of the initial organizers of the campaign. Most were inspired by the recent deposition of Latin American dictators, such as Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and Marcos Perez Jimenez in Venezuela. Therefore, the rise of democratic ideals in Latin America, along with the limited freedoms possessed by the Dominican population, galvanized activists to work for social change by ousting the military regime.

The activist's first step was to organize the Dominicans that opposed the regime, yet had failed to forge a common association due to fear of government repression. The campaign was initially unnamed and covert, yet external events unexpectedly impacted its development. On June 14, 1959, a group of exiled Dominicans aided by the Cuban government lead an unsuccessful invasion of the island. Trujillo's forces were able to quell the invasion, and they brutally tortured and murdered all survivors. Consequently, out of solidarity for their fallen compatriots, the domestic campaign adopted the name "Fourteenth of June Movement". Moreover, the brutality of the government produced a dramatic increase in the members of the resistance. Information of the rising campaign was silently spread throughout the country, and activists recruited members from different socioeconomic status and professions. Middle-class students formed the bulk of the resistance campaign, and many defied the cautious warnings of their family members. Actually, many young resisters' parents were members of the military regime. Among the actions taken by these participants were the handing out of leaflets and pamphlets against the regime, camouflaged meetings of protest, symbolic reclamations throughout the countryside, some public declarations, and attempts to recruit government officials or their family members.

The movement formally stated its objectives at a general meeting on January 10, 1960. Leaders openly declared their campaign for democracy and a new regime, as well as for some economic adjustments. As expected, shortly after the regime discovered the movement, the military began to imprison, torture and sometimes even murder its members. Those affiliated with the movement were sent to a special prison called "la 40", where they were tortured until they provided officials with adequate information. Members of the movement spread the stories of the tortures against women and students, and they recounted the infamous conditions inside the prisons. As a result, the repression and tortures augmented public support for the campaign, since many members of the population were outraged by the treatment bestowed upon their fellow citizens.

In addition, though the scope and tactics used by activists were limited, the repression they endured spurred opposition from third party actors against the regime. The Catholic Church, which had previously supported the dictatorship, became an active opponent of the government. It voiced its opposition through all of its churches, where priests read official pronouncements

denouncing the regime's violation of human rights. Similarly, government repression provoked international condemnation. Particularly, Romulo Betancourt, the president of Venezuela and a known enemy of Trujillo, led the OAS member states to sever diplomatic relations with the dictatorship. An economic trade embargo was put in place to debilitate Trujillo's government, and many embassies provided asylum to political dissidents. Moreover, the United States ceased its support of the dictatorship and withdrew its ambassador. Therefore, third party allies helped delegitimize the regime and weaken some of its traditional bases of support.

Nevertheless, the government was not significantly deterred by external pressure, and it continued to persecute its opponents. Most notably, on November 25, 1960, the three Mirabal sisters were assassinated, and the military staged the murder to make it look like a car accident. This action was easily uncovered, and it infuriated the public. Though the government had effectively eliminated most of the movement's leadership, it also sparked the reprisals that contributed to its own undoing. Despite the fact that the Fourteenth of June Movement was essentially dismantled, brutal government actions gave rise to more belligerent factions within Dominican society. As it happens, Trujillo was assassinated by a group of armed men on May 30, 1961.

However, the assassination of Trujillo does not imply the success of the nonviolent campaign. The campaign's goal was to replace the dictatorship with a democratic government, yet Trujillo's death did not change the militaristic nature of the regime. Nonetheless, the campaign was not entirely ineffective. It managed to develop a unified network of resistance against the dictatorship, promote democratic ideals and aspirations, and delegitimize the regime.

Research Notes

Influences:

Many of the leaders and participants of the campaign were influenced by the rise of democratic ideals throughout Latin America. For example, many were inspired by the fall of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in Cuba, and Marcos Perez Jimenez's military regime in Venezuela. (1)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

This is a unique case given that although violence was not used, the leaders of the movement never proclaimed the campaign a nonviolent struggle. In fact, there were plans to acquire weapons to defeat the regime, yet they never materialized.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the case may still be classified as nonviolent since such tactics were "accidentally" used. That is, the plan to use weapons was discovered, so the campaign was only left with nonviolent tactics.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Manuel Figueredo, 24/11/2011

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Source URL (retrieved on 02/17/2020 - 14:57): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/dominican-activists-challenge-rafael-trujillo-s-dictatorship-fourteenth-june-movement-1959-1>

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