The Structure of Political Opportunities and Peasant Mobilization in Central America

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The literature on the determinants of popular mobilization and social movements is rich with theoretical insights concerning the role of a variety of factors, from the generation of grievances by changing socioeconomic structures to the assistance of outside agents to the mobilization of resources. The crucial conditioning role of political systems themselves, however, has been too often understated or even ignored, whether the object of study has been urban movements in industrialized democracies\(^1\) or peasant movements in the Third World.\(^2\) Even when scholars have recently attempted to address this deficiency, their efforts remain unsystematic.

The intention of this project is, first, to elaborate a thorough conceptualization of the linkage between popular mobilization and the political system and, second, to demonstrate its utility through an explanation of the comparative mobilization of the peasantry in the five countries of Central America during the period from 1960 to 1984. The forms of peasant and government action and the resulting consequences for the peasantry have varied widely throughout Central America.\(^3\) The conceptual framework elaborated here should make clear why this has been so.

The Structure of Political Opportunities

Most of the elements needed for the conceptualization of this linkage can be found within the literature on social movements, particularly among those scholars identified with a political process approach.\(^4\) The central insight of scholars from this political process perspective is that collective action is as much a function of “the political realities confronting members and challengers at any given time”\(^5\) as it is of grievances,\(^6\) group organization, availability of resources, or underlying socioeconomic change. This insight can best be conceptualized as “the structure of political opportunities,” a term developed by Eisinger to help explain the outcomes of urban protest in the United States.\(^7\) As the structure of political opportunities shifts to the advantage of challengers, the power discrepancy between them and elites diminishes, increasing the challengers’ political leverage and improving the possibility of outcomes in their interest.\(^8\)

The general notion of political opportunity seems clear and well-established in the social movement literature.\(^9\) However, its usage still presents at least two major difficulties. First, its basic components have been differentiated by scholars idiosyncratically and unsystematically. Second, this literature is self-consciously addressed to industrialized democracies. The resulting frameworks can not be as usefully applied to other types of countries, such as those of Central America.
The best of these discussions is provided by Tarrow. In a wide-ranging survey of case studies and theoretical works, he identifies three components of the political opportunity structure but, as with the authors to follow, without specifying the logic of their derivation or justifying the completeness of his set. Tarrow's components are the openness of access to political institutions, the stability of political alignments (discussed largely in terms of electoral alignments), and the availability of allies and support groups. Kitschelt, in a comparative study of antinuclear protest movements in four industrial democracies, suggests four components, the capacity to mobilize resources (internal to the movement and external), openness of access to the public sphere and political decision making (in turn operationalized by four other indicators, largely of pluralism within various parts of the political system), the presence of other social movements also contesting the institutions of social control (following from Tarrow's concept of a "protest cycle"), and the capacity of the political system to effectively meet demands (discussed in terms of political, but not economic, variables). Finally, in a useful but somewhat confused discussion, McAdam places the structure of political opportunities as one of five "macro-political factors" related to the development of collective action. He narrowly defines the opportunity structure as "the distribution of . . . support and opposition to the political aims of a given challenging group." However, two of the other macropolitical factors could also be included in a more expanded and typical understanding of political opportunity structure. The first is regime crises, or periods of generalized political instability, and the second is the absence of repression.

It is time for conceptual clarity. Drawing on the existent literature, a good working definition of the structure of political opportunities is the configuration of forces in a (potential or actual) group's political environment that influences that group's assertion of its political claims. Since the structure of political opportunities is defined here in terms of the configuration of forces that are left unspecified, rather than by the identification of the variables themselves, it can be operationalized to take into account the uniqueness of particular cases. The salient literature, though, suggests that the following are likely to be the most important variables: the presence of allies and support groups; the availability of meaningful access points in the political system; the capacity and propensity of the state for repression; elite fragmentation and conflict; and temporal location in the cycle of protest. There is often a dynamic relationship among these variables, of course, with changes in one influencing the others.

As the subsequent sections will demonstrate, these five components incorporate those proposed by Tarrow and McAdam but eliminate two of Kitschelt's suggested components for the structure of political opportunities. The capacity to mobilize resources is certainly critical to collective action, but this capacity refers to characteristics internal to a group itself, a factor that falls outside of the scope of the usual and logical meaning of the concept. When his discussion shades into the mobilization of resources from sources external to the group, this latter aspect can be encompassed by other variables, such as the availability of allies. The other component, the capacity of the political system to effectively meet demands, is often one of the decisive determinants of outcomes, which is why Kitschelt includes it in his framework. However, the determinants of outcomes of political conflict often differ from those of collective action; therefore, the position taken here is that it is more useful not to conflate and confuse the two discussions. On the one hand, the system's
capacity to meet demands might have little if any effect on mobilization; on the other hand, that capacity itself might be more a function of nonpolitical variables—such as the level of economic development and economic growth rates—than of the political variables Kitschelt identifies.

Although political opportunity structure is a conceptual construct and not something observable, the constituent political forces are more closely tied to discernible social reality. Accordingly, political opportunity structures can be said to be objective phenomena, especially from the standpoint of observers and organizers external to the group itself. Still, mobilization and action are mediated by perception; therefore, these structures are also subjective, particularly when the perspective is that of the group itself. Consequently, political factors that facilitate/inhibit the perception of opportunities for collective action are part of the structure of political opportunities, as well.\(^\text{15}\)

In the following sections, each of these five components of the political opportunity structure will be utilized to analyze peasant mobilization in contemporary Central America, to be followed by an evaluation of the usefulness of this approach itself. First, though, the next section will give a brief background of the case material.

**Peasant Grievances in Central America**

Central America entered the post-World War II period with rural structures that were grossly unequal and exploitative. Most of the rural population lived on small subsistence plots, while most of the private land was owned by a small percentage of the landholders. Pressure on land supply already existed in El Salvador and in the most densely settled portions of the other countries, especially the western highlands of Guatemala. Because much of the region’s land is not suitable for cultivation and because population has grown at rapid rates, eventually population growth alone would have created land scarcity everywhere. But this has not been the only force with which peasants have had to contend.

As a result of the acceleration of the commercialization of agriculture, traditional agricultural structures and practices changed substantially in recent decades. Haciendas became commercial farms as new incentives encouraged established landowners and new investors to pursue new opportunities for financial gain. Sharecroppers became wage laborers, while commercial enterprises devoted to new export commodities, such as cotton, sugar, and beef, spread throughout the countryside. Similarly, small and medium size farms producing for urban markets became more commonplace.\(^\text{16}\) Underlying the mobilization of the Central American peasantry, then, has been a transformation of the class structure and a further integration of the countryside in the international market, as analysts such as Skocpol and Wolf would have us note.\(^\text{17}\)

Peasant mobilization usually originated in areas where the conversion of land to the production of commercial export crops promoted the expulsion of subsistence peasants from land they had cultivated, often for decades and even generations. For example, sustained peasant political activity in Honduras started in the early 1960s on the north coast in response to land disputes with a United Fruit Company subsidiary and was encouraged by the example of the Cuban revolution.\(^\text{18}\) As tensions escalated later in the decade,
organizations were formed to lead occupations of lands from which peasants claimed they had been illegitimately evicted.

The consequences of the commercialization of agriculture for peasant mobilization in Central America varied among the countries of the region because of differences among them in factors such as preexisting rural class structures, ethnic heterogeneity, state penetration, land scarcity, and the importance of the agricultural sector. Prior to the twentieth century, different patterns of export agriculture existed in the region due to variations in the availability of exportable crops, land, labor, and capital.\textsuperscript{19} The expansion of the production of crops such as indigo and coffee in the past resulted in the greatest losses for peasants in Guatemala and El Salvador. The powerful often relied on coercion to obtain the land and labor they required, especially if the peasants were Indians (more likely in these two countries, especially the first). Consequently, Guatemala and El Salvador entered the contemporary period with the most exploitative and coercive rural class structures. Similar dynamics occurred in Nicaragua, but less extensively. In contrast, coffee growing spread in Costa Rica with little coercion and under more egalitarian circumstances. Export agriculture had little impact on rural class relations in Honduras (with the exception of the isolated banana enclaves) until recent decades.\textsuperscript{20}

There are significant differences in the degree of inequality built into the contemporary agrarian structures of Central America. These differences, though, are missed by some indicators. A gross measure such as the Gini index of land concentration, for example, shows virtually no differences among the five countries.\textsuperscript{21} Table 1 provides a set of alternative measures of rural inequality and of economic insecurity. As measured by cropped

\textbf{Table 1} Central America: Indicators of Rural Economic Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Land\textsuperscript{1} Availability 1978/79</th>
<th>EAP\textsuperscript{2} Agriculture 1979</th>
<th>Polarization of\textsuperscript{3} Land Ownership</th>
<th>Rural Poverty\textsuperscript{4} 1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY AND SOURCES:


3. Percentage of all farms in small/medium holdings during 1970s (i.e., excludes smallest and largest holdings). Calculated from Brockett (1988: Table 4.1). Years and size of category (all in hectares): Costa Rica (1973), 10≤200; El Salvador (1971), 10≤200; Guatemala (1979), 7≤450; Honduras (1974), 10≤200; Nicaragua (1971), 14≤140. If Nicaragua were 7≤140, then the appropriate figure would be 50.5.

land per economically active person employed in agriculture, Guatemala and El Salvador have confronted the most severe land scarcity in recent years, while Honduras and Nicaragua are less constrained. Costa Rica also falls in the first group, but it has far less of its population employed in agriculture. Similar differences can be found by examining the polarization of land ownership. This measure—the percentage of total farms in each country in the “small to medium” category at some point during the 1970s—excludes both the smallest and largest farms. Accordingly, the smaller the score, the more the land distribution is polarized into plots that are too small or estates that are larger than necessary for family farming. This measure indicates that El Salvador and Guatemala have been the most polarized in land ownership, Costa Rica the least, with the other two in between.  

Finally, rural poverty is much less pervasive in Costa Rica than in the other four countries, which group closely together in their rates of total rural poverty, but with Honduras significantly the worst in “extreme” rural poverty. 

Taken together, these empirical indicators substantiate the notable differences in the agrarian structures of the Central American countries. They can be best grouped into three sets. El Salvador and Guatemala clearly are a distinct set with the worst land scarcity and polarization of land ownership combined with sizable populations employed in agriculture. Although certainly serious, the land problem has not been as bad in Honduras and especially Nicaragua. However, the commercialization of agriculture began earlier and was more thorough in Nicaragua than in Honduras, creating a substantial landless population.  

The final category is Costa Rica. Its rural population has been subjected to many of the same pressures as those elsewhere. But, with the lowest rates of rural poverty and polarization of land ownership, with the smallest agriculture-based population, and with the least experience with land expulsions, Costa Rica has had significantly lower levels of grievances and mobilization than the rest of the region. Consequently, in the following sections Costa Rica will receive little attention. 

The deterioration of material conditions and the loss of economic security following from the structural transformation of Central American agriculture provided the objective conditions and the grievances for peasant mobilization. Montes claims that for El Salvador, for example, such conditions were clearly present by 1973 and became even more so as the decade progressed. On the other hand, as Montes argues, there was little subjective readiness early in the decade. That readiness was prompted by a changing structure of political opportunities, in interaction with escalating grievances.

**Support Groups and Expanding Opportunities**

The importance of allies and support groups to the mobilization of groups lacking political power is well-established by studies such as those of U.S. farm workers and the U.S. civil rights movement. Their importance to peasant mobilization is also one of the important contributions of those writing from a political economy perspective. Successful peasant mobilization requires, at a minimum, two changes in social relations. First, traditional patronage relationships must be weakened since they are the personalized manifestation of peasants’ subordination within the status quo. Second, preexisting ties of solidarity among the peasants must be strengthened or new ties forged. Outside organizers
not only provide organizational expertise, but also offer alternative sources of economic assistance and protection to the domination of traditional patrons. Without such assistance, or with too insubstantial assistance, the politically weak are too vulnerable to usually risk overt protest and confrontation. Support groups and allies, then, are “catalysts for change” because they alter the structure of political opportunities. What is important here about such groups is not their intentions but rather the consequences of their actions for the constellation of power relations surrounding the peasantry.

Outside agents—such as religious workers, union organizers, revolutionary guerrillas, political party activists, and development workers—have been critical to the political changes of recent decades in rural Central America. One of the most important of the new political forces in rural Central America has been church workers. Often with easier access and legitimacy than other actors because of shared religious beliefs and, for priests, because of their status, church workers in each country have played a central role in peasant mobilization. Especially notable were the influence of Catholic Action and foreign missionaries in Guatemala, the church radio school program in Honduras, and base communities in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Whether these efforts were directly religious, developmental, or political, they often served to foster the transformation of attitudes from fatalistic to activist and to create new organizations to nurture this transformation and to facilitate its expression. Eventually, peasants supported by this process took the lead in asserting their rights to a better life, participating in demonstrations, marches, and land invasions. The importance of this role can be illustrated with the example of Guatemala, which is probably less familiar than the cases of El Salvador and Nicaragua but certainly not less significant.

Catholic Action was begun in Guatemala in 1946 by the church hierarchy as a conservative reaction to the changes catalyzed by the reforms of a new progressive government. Life in Indian villages had been grounded in religious beliefs and practices that combined Catholicism with pre-Columbian religion. A major purpose of Catholic Action was to further the Christian conversion of Indians by attacking and undermining indigenous “superstitions.” However, the message was taken into rural areas by missionaries who did not always share the perspective of the hierarchy. Furthermore, as Indians rejected some traditional religious beliefs, they also freed themselves from the conservative authority of traditional religious leaders and societies. This “liberation” made them available for later mobilization by change-oriented forces from the outside. These catechists were also the agents for the further diffusion of Catholic Action into more remote rural areas.

If the catechists rejected some of their native customs, they did not reject their Indian heritage. Studies found that Catholic Action fostered in the new converts, usually younger Indians, a group consciousness that encouraged them to see “themselves as ‘apostles’ carrying the new ‘social gospel’ of the Catholic Church to their less fortunate Indian brothers and sisters.” Consequently, the conversion process promoted by Catholic Action attacked not only the traditional Indian hierarchy, but also the system of social control benefiting LADINOS (non-Indians). While traditionalists worried about maintaining good ties with their LADINO PATRONES, the catechists “tend to see such relationships as repressive and exploitative, blocking the progress of Indians and the leveling of the two ethnic groups.” Freed from traditional restrictions and nonmaterialist explanations for their deprivation and inferior status, the new converts were often the leaders of new peasant organizations. The
first fifty members of a peasant league in El Quiché discussed by Falla, for example, were all Catholic Action converts.  

Reinforcing these efforts were the activities of the Christian Democratic Party, which had close ties to Catholic Action. Organizers from the party established local affiliates of the national party, encouraged supporters to run for local offices, and helped to organize peasant leagues and cooperatives. Furthermore, the party was critical to the achievement by Indians of political power on the local level.  

Historically, few Indian communities had been served by priests. In order to promote Catholic Action, and to meet the challenge of Protestant missionaries, foreign priests were now welcomed to Guatemala. The concerns of many of these priests, though, went beyond religious conversion. In the northern portion of the Indian department of Huehuetenango, for example, Maryknolls from North America established a presence in most villages by the early 1960s and converted thousands of Indians. But their efforts were also addressed to rural development, including schools, clinics, and credit cooperatives. In response to government inaction in face of the serious land pressures in the highlands, the religious workers initiated their own colonization project in the late 1960s in the underpopulated Ixčán region of the far north of the department (and country). Most important, the foreign church workers gave significant attention to the development of indigenous leaders, not only to carry out these projects, but also to take the reformist social message into the most remote Indian villages.  

The church workers were not alone in their efforts. Rural development projects also were initiated by foreign governments and private organizations, including the United States Agency for International Development (AID). During the early years of the administration of General Kjell Laugerud (1974–1978), the Guatemalan government’s attitude toward cooperatives changed to one of cautious encouragement. By fall 1975, some 20 percent of highland Indians participated in some form of cooperatives. Many new organizations entered the country following the earthquake of February 1976, which killed over 23,000 people, especially in the highlands.  

Although none of the other Central American countries received the same degree of external assistance for rural development, some did receive direct help for the formation of peasant organizations. Alarmed that the Cuban revolution might be emulated in Central America, the United States helped start peasant organizations in 1962 in both Honduras and El Salvador. The concern was especially great in Honduras, where an independent and militant organization was forming more autonomously, the National Federation of Honduran Peasants (FENACH). Within two months of its formation, a new explicitly anticommunist movement (National Association of Honduran Peasants, ANACH) was organized with substantial assistance from the United States through the AFL-CIO and its Latin American arm, the Inter-American Regional Organization of Labor (ORIT).  

In El Salvador, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (an affiliate of the AFL-CIO) initiated training in 1962 of peasant leaders through an Alliance for Progress program. Assisted by AID, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Salvadoran government, this project eventually led to the formation in 1968 of the Salvadoran Communal Union (UCS). With an initial membership of 4,000, by 1976 it claimed a membership of 80,000. A further regime effort at maintaining rural order through peasant organization was also initiated during the mid 1960s with the formation of the Democratic Nationalist Organization
(ORDEN). Although its membership grew to about 100,000 rural people, it is usually claimed that all but about 5 to 10 percent had joined only as a means of self-protection.\textsuperscript{43} ORDEN functioned as a large auxiliary to the National Guard for maintaining rural order and as an instrument of repression for which the regime could—hypocritically—deny complicity.\textsuperscript{44}

In contrast to such organizations, whose rationale was the maintenance of the system, a number of more autonomous organizations with the purpose of pressing forth peasant demands were organized. Fundamental to their formation and growth were the efforts of political activists, such as union organizers, political party activists, progressive students, and revolutionary guerrillas. FENACH in Honduras, for example, was formed with the assistance of leaders who had settled in the area after having been fired by United Fruit following an important strike in 1954. Its successes in organizing land invasions/recoveries, though, were short-lived. After the civilian government was overthrown in 1963, FENACH was destroyed; the leaders who were caught were jailed, its offices and archives were demolished, and its membership repressed.

In El Salvador the most important nonregime peasant organization was the Christian Federation of Peasants of El Salvador (FECCAS), which developed during the 1960s with the aid of church workers and the Christian Democratic Party. It received a big boost in 1974 with the formation of the United Popular Action Front (FAPU), an autonomous coalition of various progressive groups, including FECCAS.\textsuperscript{45} In early 1976, FECCAS formed a strategic alliance with a more radical peasant organization (the Union of Rural Workers, UTC), and in 1978 they merged into the Rural Workers' Federation (FTC). Behind these peasant organizations was the assistance of the popular organizations and of the growing revolutionary movements.\textsuperscript{46} In response, the right relied on repression to protect its position. Similarly throughout the region, the fate of peasant organizations, especially the more autonomous ones, has been heavily dependent on the nature of the response by political and private elites.

**Meaningful Access Points**

Outside of rare revolutionary transformations, the claims of the disadvantaged are handled, if at all, within existing political structures. The political opportunities for challengers, then, vary with the availability of meaningful access points within the political system itself. The relevant access points are well-known, from interest aggregating institutions such as political parties to legislatures to bureaucracies and top-level executive decision makers. By meaningful I mean both institutionalized and power-wielding. Access to political parties has little meaning if elections are fraudulent or if governments are overthrown; access to legislators, if legislatures have little power; access to bureaucrats, if they do not make the decisions. Generally, political opportunities vary for challengers with the degree of access they have to the decision makers who exercise the power salient to their claims.

Recent decades offer a wide variety of changing patterns of political access among the Central American countries. Outside of Costa Rica, meaningful popular access to the political system is not institutionalized; accordingly, fluctuations in this component of the opportunity structure has been a crucial determinant of variations in peasant mobilization.
Space does not permit even a sketchy discussion of changes in political access in each country. Instead, its importance will be illustrated with the cases of Nicaragua and Honduras.

In contrast to the intransigence and repression of the Somoza regime, peasant organization in Nicaragua received substantial support from the Sandinistas during the struggle against the dictatorship and in the months after the revolutionary victory of July 1979. The Association of Rural Workers (ATC), which played an important role in the struggle against Somoza in the Pacific coastal area, received much organizational assistance from both the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and a Jesuit-backed organization. After the revolution and before 1979 was over, the membership of the ACT had reached 59,000; by June 1980, it was about 120,000 members. In 1981 it was split, with the National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG) formed to represent small and medium producers, leaving rural wage earners as the base of the ATC. A notable sign of the access to policymakers enjoyed by these organizations was the substantial role they played in the formulation of the Agrarian Reform Law, which was promulgated in July 1981. As peasant frustrations mounted in the following years, these organizations were able to press forth their demands, not only through the presentation of evidence and arguments, but also through demonstrations. The government responded to these demands, especially in 1985 when the pace of land redistribution accelerated and changes also were enacted to provide more attractive incentives to rural workers and producers.

In Honduras, peasants had organized and were asserting themselves by the end of the 1960s to a degree unparalleled in Central America to that point and perhaps even in all of Latin America. The results of this mobilization for their demands, however, have been mixed. Catalyzed by the land enclosures mentioned earlier and assisted by workers from the church and international development agencies, peasant mobilization was facilitated by a political opening that began in 1967 with the appointment of a sympathetic director to the agrarian reform agency (INA) and that was enlarged both by the popular opposition to fraudulent municipal elections in March 1968 and by the fall-out of the loss in the war with El Salvador in July 1969. When INA began to adjudicate land conflicts in favor of peasants, the results were electrifying in many peasant communities, accelerating further organization and occupations.

Peasant successes varied in subsequent years as government access opened and closed. With the election of a conservative president in June 1971, the settlement of disputes in favor of peasants virtually ceased, while those occupying the land were likely to be arrested. Opposition of large landholders also solidified during this period, and at times violence was employed against land occupiers. In response, peasants became more restive, and their hunger march on the capital in December 1972 was partially responsible for a coup, which brought General Oswaldo López Arellano back to power, along with a group of progressive junior officers. Having explicitly aligned himself with popular classes prior to the coup, López soon issued an emergency land reform measure, which was followed in January 1975 by an agrarian reform law.

Within a few months, however, López was removed from power and replaced by more conservative leaders. In the face of delay in implementation of the law by the new government, and despite occasional violence, peasant mobilization increased throughout 1975, including marches and demonstrations and a record number of land occupations, with
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some support from organized urban interests. The government finally acted with a plan for the recovery and adjudication of public and idle private lands. Although a substantial amount of land was redistributed, significant opposition to the agrarian reform remained within the government and on the part of economic elites, making implementation of the program very difficult. By early 1977, opponents of reform had clearly won; the last of the progressive military were sent into “diplomatic exile.”

Conditions for peasant political activity improved in Honduras with the return of an elected civilian government in 1982. By now, though, the peasant movement was fragmented badly, with at least fourteen different organizations claiming to speak for the peasantry. Furthermore, redistributive policies and politics based on mass mobilization always have been difficult in Central America, but especially when their legitimacy could now be questioned in the light of the vigilance claimed by elites to be required in face of the “Communist threat” presented by Nicaragua. No sooner had the Honduran congress passed an antiterrorist law in 1982, for example, than peasants found it applied against their leaders as “subversives.”51

Conditions for peasant mobilization have been consistently less propitious in Guatemala and El Salvador in the postwar period, with the exception of the reform period in Guatemala from 1944 to 1954. Otherwise, access to policymakers in these two countries has largely been closed to peasants. More important determinants of peasant mobilization for them have been repression and elite cohesion, certainly critical factors for Honduras and Nicaragua as well.

Repression

The intensity of repression is not directly related to the level of threat perceived by elites. Instead, regimes and leaders vary both in their willingness to tolerate popular mobilization and in their capability to respond with coercion instead. Capacity is obviously a necessary precondition for repression, but in some respects propensity is more crucial.52 As Gurr points out, “historical traditions of state terror . . . probably encourage elites to use terror irrespective of . . . structural factors.”53 Challengers are also constrained by these historical traditions. Challengers not only respond to current regime actions, but also must anticipate future actions, calculations that in turn are based on memories and stories of past elite behavior. The relatively unmobilized state that prevailed around 1960 among Central American peasants, for example, rather than an invariant condition, was in part the consequence of earlier cycles of mobilization and repression, such as in Guatemala in the 1950s, El Salvador in the 1930s, Nicaragua in the 1920s, each of the three countries in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and extending further all of the way back to the Conquest in the sixteenth century. State terror, as Mitchell et al. point out, does “have a kind of ‘half-life’ of its own, which lingers and has effects for some time after the observable use of terror by state agents.”54 This reality is well captured by Huizer’s concept of a “culture of repression.”55

The political opportunity structure facing Central American peasants in recent decades has varied widely because of great differences in governmental reliance on repression. It also had differed historically. The elites of Guatemala and El Salvador had been more likely to
utilize coercion in the past to obtain the land and labor they desired for their economic enterprises and to rely on repression to keep those structures in place. The point here is twofold. First, the agrarian class structures of these two countries were more exploitative than in the other countries and were protected by more elaborate and extensive repressive institutions. Accordingly, any mass mobilization in these two countries would be perceived by elites (correctly) as more of a fundamental threat. Second, given the scope of the violence that had been used in the past, elites would be more likely to believe that violence was an acceptable and effective response to any perceived threats in the present. This same record constrains mass mobilization: the memory of past repression is part of the calculation of the risks involved in collective action contemplated in the present. The historical memory in repressive societies, then, legitimates coercion for elites and discourages collective action by popular forces, thereby upholding the "culture of repression."

Some political space for popular organizing did open during the mid 1970s in both Guatemala and El Salvador. The administration of General Kjell Auugrud (1974–1978) in Guatemala was considerably less repressive than those preceding and following (although regime violence certainly continued during this period). Confronting a deteriorating economic situation and encouraged by advocates for social change from the outside, increasing numbers of Indian peasants began to organize in Guatemala in the mid 1970s for economic and political action. Indian candidates won municipal elections, and two were elected at mid decade to the national congress. In 1978, the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC) was organized, the first organization to bring together Indian subsistence and migrant farmers with poor Ladino farmworkers. In its first public appearance at the May 1, 1980, Labor Day parade, the CUC presented the largest public demonstration of Indians the country had seen.56 The strength of the CUC and its potential threat to elite interests was demonstrated by a series of strikes that year, including 70,000 sugar cane workers, 40,000 cotton pickers, and 10,000 coffee harvesters.57 Further organizing successes were precluded, however, by indiscriminate state violence directed against union leaders and members. During 1980 alone, about 110 union leaders were killed, as well as over 300 peasant leaders.58

Similarly in El Salvador, a regime liberalization beginning in the late 1960s opened some political space for popular organizing through the mid 1970s, although not policy responsiveness to peasant demands. Both regime-linked peasant organizations and autonomous peasant organizations backed by popular organizations and revolutionary movements grew in size to the end of the 1970s. By the end of the decade, the mass popular organizations with which the progressive peasant organizations were affiliated had become the most dynamic political force in the country. At the same time, however, regime violence aimed at peasant leaders and their allies also escalated.

Repression, though, does not have an invariant impact on mobilization. Indiscriminate repression can antagonize as many people into action as it neutralizes.59 The regime violence of the 1970s in El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as in Nicaragua, provoked further popular resistance, rather than beating the population back into submission. The reliance on unjustified violence stiffened the resolve of many who were already in opposition and delegitimized the regime for many others, many of whom were politicized and radicalized. Increasing numbers of peasants gave their support to the growing revolutionary armies, many becoming participants themselves. As terrible as it was, at this stage the repression
was not sufficient to protect the regimes of these three countries. Consequently, the violence was escalated. The application of systematic state terrorism from 1980 to 1983 in El Salvador and to 1984 in Guatemala accomplished, for the time, its purpose. Although revolutionary forces continue their struggles in both countries, the tens of thousands of murders in each country were sufficient to destroy popular organizations and restore fear and passivity in much of the countryside. In Nicaragua in contrast, Somoza’s willingness even to destroy the nation’s cities with his air force was not sufficient to save his regime. During the final battles of the civil war his forces killed on levels approaching those of the other two countries but, unlike in the other two, his personalistic dictatorship had alienated all sectors of society and had not developed the institutional capacity to implement state terrorism on the same systematic level.

Duvall and Stohl point out that the propensity to rely on state terrorism is determined not only by self-imposed constraints on violence as an instrument of governance, but also by “the perceptual social distance between the government and the victim population.” On a class basis this social distance is the most pronounced in Guatemala and El Salvador, with their more polarized class structures. More important, though, is ethnic heterogeneity. The people most likely to be victims of state terrorism in Central America in recent decades have been the Indians of Guatemala’s western highlands—the contemporary manifestation of the racism that stretches back to the liberal reforms of the nineteenth century and back further to the Conquest.

**Elite Fragmentation and Conflict**

Organizations asserting the claims of the disadvantaged invariably confront a formidable array of elite interests. When political, military, and economic elites are cohesive, the political opportunities for challengers are usually minimal; as elites fragment and come into conflict, opportunities open; in rare cases, elite fragmentation and conflict contribute to a regime crisis so severe as to allow for a revolutionary outcome. This component of the structure of political opportunities is clearly as complex as it is critical. First, the salient elites might not only be domestic but also include those of a hegemonic power, such as the United States when the subject is Central America. Second, elite fragmentation and conflict are dimensions that can and do vary independently with differential implications for collective action. For example, a situation of medium to high elite fragmentation would probably facilitate the mobilization of the disadvantaged, but if combined with low elite conflict there would be a low probability for significant changes in the distribution of power and resources. In the opposite situation, low elite fragmentation would not be as conducive to popular mobilization, but medium to high elite conflict would create the possibility of a higher payoff for the disadvantaged than would the first situation. The resolution of this low elite fragmentation/high conflict situation would in turn be substantially determined by the third major aspect of elite alignments to be considered here, the pattern of elite-state relations. A cohesive elite dominating the state presents potential challengers with a discouraging situation, certainly more so than a state with some measure of autonomy from dominant economic elites. In summary, the central point is this: as elite and elite-state
alignments vary, so do the opportunities for challengers to assert their claims and to gain favorable outcomes.

There have been important differences among the countries of Central America in elite cohesion, as well as in the relationship of dominant classes, such as the agrarian bourgeoisie, to the state. Midlarsky and Roberts have fruitfully compared El Salvador and Nicaragua in this context. They identify the pre-1979 military regime of El Salvador as an “instrumentalist state,” that is, one where “the state is essentially . . . [though] never entirely an instrument of class domination.”67 The land issue in El Salvador appeared to elites as zero sum in nature, given both the extreme inequality in land ownership and the scarcity of land availability. Government inflexibility on the issue was required and insured by the military regime’s willingness to serve the agrarian bourgeoisie’s fundamental interests.

Somoza's Nicaragua, though, was an “autonomous personalist state,” a clear example of a country where the “interests served by the state are those of the personal ruler and his cohorts, rather than those of a unified dominant class, that state as an institution, or national development.”68 The agrarian bourgeoisie of Nicaragua never developed the coherence or the political power of its counterparts in El Salvador and Guatemala, first because of interventions by Great Britain and the United States, and then because it was preempted by the Somoza dynasty.68 Although the policies of the Somoza governments often benefited the landowning class, their interests could also diverge, as they did increasingly during the 1970s. Under the right circumstances, then, an antidictator coalition including both peasants and landlords could, and did, form. Somoza had another vulnerability that set him apart from the other regimes of the region: his was the most dependent in the region on the United States. Relatively autonomous from and superior to economic elites domestically, his dynasty was a client of the regional hegemonic power (and clearly the two points are related). The rural repression of 1974–1976 went relatively unnoticed in the United States, but Somoza faced (and responded to) a far different situation with the United States in 1977–1979. These constraints help to explain why, although his “mop-up” operations after mass insurrections were horrendous, oppositional leaders did not disappear with the frequency occurring in the neighboring countries experiencing more systematic terrorism. Somoza’s response to the loss of unconditional support in Washington provided a number of opportunities exploited by his domestic opposition.

Following the fall of Somoza in July 1979, the United States altered its policy toward the region, with the primary objective of avoiding any further revolutionary situations and, certainly, outcomes. Pressures were applied on the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala to improve their human rights practices and to undertake reforms in order to forestall a victory by the left. Since El Salvador was already on the verge of a revolutionary situation, it was both the object of greater concern and more vulnerable to pressure. A coup in October 1979 ended the overt military regime but could not forestall civil war. The political and economic changes in the following year, though especially the agrarian reform, broke the subservience of the state to landed elites and attacked some of that elite’s fundamental interests.69 The military still remains the most powerful domestic actor; however, under pressures from the United States it has fragmented over the issues of class alliances and preferred regime type. Civilian leaders have had the backing of the United States but lack the requisite power to fully institutionalize civilian rule. This fragmentation
and conflict between elites opened a major opportunity for popular forces during late 1979 and 1980, and their mass mobilization not only gained policy results but also brought the country close to a revolutionary transformation. In the face of this fundamental threat, and with the change to the Reagan administration in early 1981, Salvadoran and U.S. elites consented to or acquiesced in the vicious state terrorism of the early 1980s that smashed the oppositional organizations except for the guerrilla armies.

Midlarsky and Roberts classify Guatemala, in a brief remark, as an instrumentalist state along with El Salvador. Certainly the resemblances are substantial. However, the Guatemalan military’s control of the state by the 1970s was more total and secure than in El Salvador, with greater autonomy from economic elites. A more appropriate classification, then, would be as an “autonomous military state.”

This autonomy and firm control placed the Guatemalan military in a better position to resist pressures from the Carter administration in its last two years, pressures that were much less than those applied to El Salvador anyway. The military government of 1974–1978 was more permissive than the preceding one, creating political space for the rapid organization of middle-class groups, which in turn created a more hospitable climate for the mobilization of the peasantry. When this political activity by popular forces was perceived by military and economic elites as a threat, though, the Guatemalan military had the capacity and the autonomy to respond as ferociously as it believed necessary.

In contrast, the coffee bourgeoisie of Costa Rica was larger, less wealthy, and less parasitic from the first years of the coffee boom of the nineteenth century, for reasons that go back, in part, to its distinctive colonization pattern. The coffee bourgeoisie’s share of political power declined as society became more urban, industrial, and democratic (but not without conflict). Following from its civil war of 1948, Costa Rica now provides Latin America’s closest approximation of the “polyarchic state:” an institutionalized polyarchical political system with an important measure of autonomy from economic elites. A further pattern is provided by Honduras. As late as 1960, both its agrarian bourgeoisie and its state were quite weak in comparison to its neighbors, largely because of the lack of a significant domestically controlled exportable crop to provide the capital necessary for either to expand. Although that expansion followed rapidly in the subsequent decades, Honduras through the mid 1970s presented the best possibility in the region for the redirection of public policy toward the peasantry’s interests without prior changes in class-state relations. The permeability of its political system has lessened, though, as both economic elites and the state have strengthened, each through economic growth and the latter with the militarization of the 1980s under the guidance of the United States.

**Location in the Protest Cycle**

The final component of the structure of political opportunities to be isolated here is temporal location in the “cycle of protest.” As Tarrow has demonstrated in a number of his works, collective action often occurs in the larger context of a protest cycle, a temporal location with significant implications for challengers. Protest cycles are characterized by the diffusion of conflict throughout society at levels of frequency and intensity that are higher than normal. This activity builds, peaks, and then declines back to more normal levels.
Generally, a challenger asserting its claims on the upswing of the cycle will fare better than those late in the cycle or after its completion. During the upswing of a cycle, many groups and movements will be asserting their claims, placing greater pressure on the system to respond to demands than any could individually. Systems and their elites, though, adapt only so far; short of revolutionary transformations, responsiveness declines and repressive measures become more likely. Challenges made late in the cycle or afterwards face a less favorable opportunity structure.73

It might be argued that the cycle of protest is not really a component of the structure of political opportunities but rather is a description of the opening and closing of the political opportunity structure itself. Such a view would be mistaken. As Tarrow demonstrates with the Italian protest cycle of 1965–1975,74 temporal location in the cycle is an independent component of the opportunity structure for individual social movements. It is also clear from the Central American case material that cycles of protest did occur in that region, notably Honduras from 1968 to 1976 and both El Salvador and Guatemala from the mid 1970s through 1980.

The analytic utility of the cycle of protest for the Central American cases, however, is another matter. In each of the three cases noted above, repression ended the cycle while it was still building, especially in El Salvador and Guatemala. Accordingly, the full dynamics of the cycle described by Tarrow were not allowed to develop. Although he does discuss the role of repression as part of the downward swing of the cycle, in Italy repression was occasional and highly specific to small groups outside of the mainstream of political life. The same is also true of the ending of the civil rights protests of the 1960s in the United States.75 In contrast, repression in Central America had been directed at the heart of social movements, and in El Salvador and Guatemala across society. In these two cases repression led to the deaths of tens of thousands of noncombatants in order to bring the cycle of protest to an abrupt end.76 Repression also played an important role in Nicaragua; indeed, it could be argued that a true cycle of protest was never able to unfold because of repression. Accordingly, many challengers adopted an insurrectional strategy, one that was not continual but rather episodic.

These considerations suggest that, although temporal location in the cycle of protest can be an important component of the structure of political opportunities for institutionalized polyarchical systems, it will be less significant in systems where both meaningful popular access to the political system and the rule of law are not institutionalized. In systems such as those of Central America (excluding Costa Rica), elites are still able to end popular mobilization through widespread repression when the level of protest too seriously threatens their interests.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to bring together under the concept of the structure of political opportunities a variety of political factors that scholars have found to be relevant in explaining the origins and the course of popular mobilization. It is now time to assess the results. Conclusions will be presented for the utility of this framework for differentiating the
determinants and fate of peasant mobilization within the five countries of Central America, as well as for the determinants of the country differences themselves.

The involvement of support groups and allies from outside of peasant communities was a factor of supreme importance throughout Central America. They were usually critical to the mobilization of peasants and the development of peasant organizations, in part because of their organizational skills and activist value system, but especially because their presence and activities altered the configuration of power in the countryside. They offered alternative sources of economic assistance and protection to peasants directly and through their links to urban and international groups. Analytically, though, this component of the structure of political opportunities was not useful in distinguishing country differences because this study is at too general a level of analysis. This component would be more useful analytically, the more detailed the discussion and the more specific the level of inquiry (for example, in comparing the fates of individual peasant movements as opposed to the entire peasant sector, as here). The same is true for the protest cycle, the final component of the political opportunity structure confronting groups. Temporal location in the cycle of protest is an important variable for the fate of individual organizations but is of little utility for comparison at more general levels of analysis. Furthermore, and regardless of the level of analysis, this component seems to be more salient in the analysis of collective action in institutionalized democracies than in countries where widespread repression closes access to the political system and undermines the rule of law.

In contrast, the three regime-related components emerge as powerful determinants of differences in mobilization at all levels of analysis, from individual groups to the entire peasant sector, whether compared over time within one country or between countries. Elite fragmentation and conflict create opportunities for mass mobilization. In countries without institutionalized civilian polyarchical rule, officials committed to democratization open access to the political system to the extent that they are successful in their project, directly by creating opportunities for mass politics and indirectly by facilitating the activities of outside support groups. When some elite groups share some objectives with popular forces, these forces are energized, and the possibilities for success are enhanced, even leading in rare occasions to a successful revolutionary outcome, such as in Nicaragua. Elites, though, are usually not so fragmented; instead, mass mobilization leads to perceptions of threat by elites. As the perception of threat increases, elite differences usually are minimized, and repression follows. The severity and success of repression, however, is determined not just by the level of threat perceived, but also by the capacity and propensity for repression.

Although each of these components of the political opportunity structure has been important to peasant mobilization in all of the countries under study here, the configuration of their relative significance varies between countries. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, propensity and capacity for repression must be regarded as the crucial factor differentiating them from the other two countries. Once popular mobilization was perceived as a serious threat, regimes responded with massive repression. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, however, elite fragmentation and conflict led to different outcomes than in Guatemala, where the military had a firmer hold on state power and faced fewer constraints from other elites. Honduras is not distinguished from these three countries by lower levels of peasant mobilization—indeed, Honduran peasant mobilization was easily the equivalent of
the others prior to the onset in those three of widespread repression. Instead, Honduras was distinct in the lower propensity of state actors to utilize repression, as well as a lesser capacity until the 1980s. Access to policymakers also was a more important determinant in Honduras; at several points peasants enjoyed greater access than in the other three (with the exception of revolutionary Nicaragua). The loss of this access stifled further action and reduced or ended positive outcomes. The institutionalized polyarchical system of Costa Rica affords the peasantry of that country better access, but the levels of peasant organization and mobilization have been lower than in the rest of the region because of the smaller size of the peasant sector and because its grievances are less intense.

As for the determinants of these country differences in the structure of political opportunity facing peasant mobilization, they have fundamentally been the consequence of resource availability (especially land) and preexisting agrarian structures. Generally, Costa Rica and Honduras had less repressive structures to begin with as well as less resource constraints on the ability of willing governments to meet peasant demands for land. Although serious agrarian problems remain in both countries, relative to the other three regime responsiveness (and "mild" repression in Honduras) has been sufficient to hold rural grievances below the level where they would represent a serious threat to the maintenance of the system.

In Guatemala in the early 1950s, the underutilized lands of the United Fruit Company and of national farms were sufficient to allow a major redistribution without attacking large-scale commercial agriculture. By the 1970s, though, land pressures due to both the further expansion of commercial agriculture and population growth in Guatemala, as well as El Salvador, intensified elite opposition to any serious consideration of land reform or other needs of the peasantry. Given that both systems were based on highly exploitative labor systems, intensifying land pressures heightened the probability that peasant mobilization would be experienced as an intolerable threat to the existing system. The pattern of state-class relations insured that the necessary coercive measures would be taken to eliminate that threat. In Nicaragua, however, land pressures were not as acute, nor was the labor system as coercive (speaking only relatively). Furthermore, the landowning class had been preempted from exercising state power by the Somoza dynasty. These are some of the reasons why the agrarian bourgeoisie in Nicaragua did not at first experience the popular mobilization there as the same degree of threat perceived by its counterparts in Guatemala and El Salvador. When the revolution triumphed, Sandinista ideology preordained the championing of peasant interests, but it was the virtual automatic creation of a substantial public agrarian sector with the flight of the Somocistas that allowed them to do so at relatively little economic or political cost.

As the 1980s drew to a close in Central America, peasant grievances against the allocation of benefits within the existing sociopolitical order remained widespread. It would be impossible to predict with any certainty the future direction of peasant movements in the region and the outcome of their efforts. What this study has established, though, is that the structure of political opportunities will be a primary determinant of the fates of these movements. As peasants attempt to redirect public policy, their efforts will be constrained or facilitated by the availability of allies and support groups, by the degree of access to policymakers, by the amount of fragmentation and conflict among elites, by the state's capacity and propensity for repression, and by their temporal location in a cycle of protest.
NOTES

I am most grateful to Sidney Tarrow for his comments on an earlier version of this study. Suggestions from this journal’s anonymous reviewers helped to improve its clarity. The case material in this study draws from another paper, “A Comparative Analysis of Peasant Mobilization and Demobilization in Central America,” presented at the Fourteenth International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, New Orleans, March 17–19, 1988.


3. The terms “peasant” and “peasantry” are employed loosely in this study, conforming to the definition provided by Henry A. Landsberger and Cynthia N. Hewitt of “any rural cultivator who is low in economic and political status.” See “Ten Sources of Weakness and Cleavage in Latin American Peasant Movements,” in Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ed., Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1970), p. 560. This usage does not assume any particular set of values or agricultural practices.


6. Much of the social movement literature of the last decade or so has unwisely minimized the importance of the generation of new grievances (and/or the intensification of old grievances) as a determinant of collective action. The lack of attention to this subject in this essay should be understood as due to the lack of space, not a lack of theoretical interest. In another paper I am exploring the interaction in subjective experience of grievances and political opportunities. Certainly the perception of closing political opportunities—such as fraudulent elections, declining responsiveness, and repressive acts—can generate new grievances. Similarly, the perception of degrees of opportunity or constraint can be influenced by the level of grievances. For example, political opportunity structures that discourage mobilization at one level of grievances might be perceived as less constraining when grievances escalate.


8. McAdam, Political Process, p. 43.

9. See, for example, Tarrow, Struggling to Reform; Herbert P. Kitschelt, “Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies,” British Journal of Political Science, 16 (1986), 57–85; and McAdam, “Micro-mobilization.” The notion of opportunity plays an important role in Charles Tilly’s model of collective action, but its meaning and components are not as closely discussed by Tilly as by the authors utilized here. See, for example, From Mobilization to Revolution, pp. 133–142. For a parallel construct in the field of
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11. Kitschelt, pp. 60-64.
13. Ibid., p. 247.
14. His discussion indicates that he is aware of the close relationship of these three factors; however, the remaining two—"suddenly imposed grievances" and "welfare state expansion and the politicization of private life"—are so different in nature that the logic of his full set is not apparent.
15. Christian Bay's discussion of "potential freedom" is most relevant to this issue, but beyond the scope of this essay. See *The Structure of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).
20. Much of the literature on peasant mobilization is concerned with the varying mobilization potential of different types of peasants, such as middle peasants versus wage laborers. For a good concise introduction to these issues, see Skocpol, "What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?" These are important issues, but they will not be pursued in this study, which instead can be understood as responding to Skocpol's implicit challenge when she wrote: "There has been too much of a tendency in the literature to suppose that the adherence of peasants to organized revolutionary movements must be explained by the economic interests and social circumstances of the peasants themselves" (p. 364).
21. Roughly comparable Gini index data gives the following ranking: Guatemala, .82; Costa Rica and El Salvador, .81; Nicaragua, .80; and Honduras, .78. See Muller and Seligson, "Inequality and Insurgency," Table A-1.
22. The country differences are suggestive, not exact, since the scope of this category of farms varies between countries. As the notes to the table explain, the Guatemalan data has a much broader scope than the others; if its data could be made more comparable, then it would be even more polarized. Conversely, the table uses a smaller scope for Nicaragua; comparable data for it, then, would show a less polarized situation. That is, fully comparable data would increase the gap between Guatemala and Nicaragua.
29. Migdal, pp. 208-211, 228-232; Singelmann, pp. 134-140, 163; White, pp. 244-245, 301, 344, 401, 500-506. A clear example of this critical role of outside organizers is provided by anthropologist Richard N. Adams in his discussion of the peasant mobilization in Guatemala during the 1944-1954 reform period in *Crucifixion by Power: Essays on Guatemalan National Social Structure*, 1944-1966 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970). "Indians and Ladinos found that it was possible to seek out other authorities and sources of power than those familiar in the unitary
patronal system. Whereas before, the patron or the elders had the last word, it was increasingly assumed that not only were they no longer the final authority, but they also could be ignored almost at will. The operation of these new organizations demonstrated that campesinos could expect some satisfaction without retribution from the local landowner or the local council of elders” (p. 191, also p. 205).


32. The underlying question of whether outside agents are needed to raise the “false consciousness” of the oppressed can not be addressed here. Scott’s argument is compelling that “circumstances and expectations” are more important determinants of passivity than is the internalization of oppression. Since the disadvantaged are usually demobilized by realistic estimates of the odds against them rather than just by the attitudes that are the consequence of those estimates, the appearance of alternative sources of assistance and protection can change these calculations and therefore behavior.


33. For a comparable point concerning peasant mobilization in Southeast Asia see Popkin, pp. 260–261.

34. A similar process of politization and organization through the efforts of church workers also occurred in El Salvador and Nicaragua, as is now well-known. The process often began with the formation of Christian base communities. In these small Bible study groups, peasants were encouraged to apply the lessons about dignity and justice to their own lives. Participants also elected their own leaders, both lay teachers and preachers; between 1970 and 1976 in El Salvador, for example, about 15,000 had been trained. See Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 97–117.


39. See, for example, Brintnall, pp. 158–160.


43. Montgomery, p. 207n.


45. Soon other popular organizations would develop (in part, through fragmentation). By the last years of the 1970s, they were the most dynamic political force in the country and actively mobilizing peasants.


48. The extent to which these organizations truly represent their constituencies is a matter of some controversy. Contrast the views, for example, of Deere, Marchetti, and Reinhardt with Colburn, pp. 97, 109.
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61. A rough measure of the inferior capacity of the Nicaraguan forces is provided by the number of security force personnel per square mile in the late 1970s in the region: El Salvador (including its National Guard), 1.09; Guatemala, .43; Honduras, .27; Costa Rica, .15; Nicaragua, .13. See Charles D. Brockett, “Sources of State Terrorism in Rural Central America,” paper presented at the International Conference on State Organized Terrorism, Michigan State University, Nov. 2–5, 1988, Table 2.


63. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.

64. I am grateful to Sidney Tarrow for pointing out to me the importance of this distinction.

65. See, for example, Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

66. Midlarsky and Roberts, “Class, State, and Revolution in Central America,” p. 181. As explained below, this is a questionable characterization of the relationship after the October 1979 coup.

69. The Salvadoran case illustrates Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Peter B. Evans’ point that “increased pressure from subordinate classes is a . . . source of increased state autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant class . . . As the state apparatus is called on to take a more active role in repressing subordinate groups, it becomes more willing to move against dominant groups as well.” See “The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, p. 63.
71. Tarrow, *Struggling to Reform, Democracy and Disorder*.
73. For an excellent discussion of the fate of the U.S. Civil rights movement of the 1960s in this context, see McAdam, *Political Process*.
74. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*.
75. McAdam, *Political Process*.
76. The end of the protest cycle—understood as an atypically high level of popular mobilization across society—does not mean the end of protest. Clearly protest continued in both countries, but under the severest of constraints. The fates of armed revolutionary organizations and of protest cycles can differ. Indeed, the same repression that kills the protest cycle can provoke additional mass support for and involvement in armed revolutionary organizations. This is, in fact, what occurred in both El Salvador and Guatemala in the early 1980s.
77. Documentation for this section can be found in Brockett, *Land Power, and Poverty*.