

SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ROOTS OF NATIONAL REVOLTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA *

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Since the mid-1970s, tens of thousands of persons in three out of the five Central American countries have revolted against their governments or fought to repress such rebellions. These conflicts have cost more than a quarter of a million lives and created more than two million internal and external refugees. In 1979 a bloody insurrection toppled Nicaragua's Somoza regime. El Salvador's crippling civil war has escalated and reescalated but remains stalemated. In Guatemala since 1980, brutal counterinsurgency warfare, pro-regime terror, and political reform have failed to eliminate a resurgent guerrilla rebellion. Yet while these countries have rent themselves with political violence, their neighbors Honduras and Costa Rica have in general remained politically peaceful.

This article draws on theories of sociopolitical violence and revolution in an attempt to explain the origin of the widespread popular political mobilization that has played a major part in Central America's recent rebellions. The study employs aggregate data from the 1950s through the 1980s as well as descriptive data to explore how differences in the rate and nature of economic growth, income and wealth distribution, and governmental response to unrest may have contributed to rebellions in Somoza's Nicaragua (1977-1979), El Salvador (since 1979), and Guatemala (since 1978) and to the lack of rebellions in Honduras and Costa Rica.

These violent upheavals exhibit many common features but also important differences. All of them cannot be classified as revolutions because only Nicaragua's Sandinistas won power and attempted a full-scale social revolution. In this context, John Walton's concept of national revolt, which is broader than revolution, provides a useful common

*This article is an extensively revised version of a paper presented at the International Congress of Americanists in Manchester, England, 6-10 September 1982. Support for further research was provided in part by 1984 and 1986 faculty research grants from the University of North Texas. Excellent comments on earlier drafts by Carlos Vilas, Mitch Seligson, Tom Walker, Gil Merkx, Cynthia Chalker, several anonymous *LARR* reviewers, and others are gratefully acknowledged.

framework for studying all three cases.¹ The national revolt concept also permits comparing these cases with the Central American countries that have not experienced such revolts.

SCHOLARSHIP ON CENTRAL AMERICA'S NATIONAL REVOLTS

The study of Central American conflict, violence, and revolution has grown rapidly over the last decade. Although little of the resulting literature is explicitly theoretical,² several distinct approaches emphasize the following causes of rebellion in the isthmus: the development of production and evolving class relations;³ domestic political factors such as elites, pressure groups, and the breakdown of the state or traditional systems of dominance;⁴ "communist subversion";⁵ religion and religious groups;⁶ and other domestic and external actors.⁷

It has become increasingly common to treat Central America's recent national revolts as having been produced by a complicated combination of developmental changes and internal and external political processes. According to what may be the most promising theories,⁸ recent economic development trends worsened the region's historically extreme maldistribution of wealth and income, intensifying grievances among negatively affected class groups. These grievances escalated in the 1970s

1. Walton defines national revolts as "protracted, intermittently violent, nonlocal struggles [with extensive] mobilization of classes and status groups that become recognized claimants of rival sovereignty and engage the state" (1984, 13). He argues that national revolts ultimately affect policy and social development in the incumbent regime. Most national revolts, however, never lead to a revolutionary program because they fail to wrest power from the regime.

2. See, for instance, Schulz (1984b).

3. For examples, see Brockett (1988), Bulmer-Thomas (1987), Castillo Rivas (1983), Durham (1979), Graham (1984), Pérez Brignoli and Baíres Martínez (1983), Chinchilla (1980), and Weeks (1985a).

4. For example, Aguilera Peralta (1983), Arnson (1984), Baloyra (1982, 1983), Castellano Cambranes (1984), Jung (1984), Millett (1984a), and Schulz (1984a).

5. See, for instance, Cruz Sequeira (1984), Enders (1982, 9), U.S. Department of State (1981a), U.S. Department of State-U.S. Department of Defense (1984a, 1984b), Kirkpatrick (1984, 167-72), and Leiken, ed. (1984).

6. See, for example, Berryman (1984), Bonpane (1985), Cáceres Prendes et al. (1983), Crahan (1982, 1984), Dodson and Montgomery (1982), Dodson and O'Shaughnessy (1990), Leronoux (1984), Montgomery (1984), O'Shaughnessy and Serra (1986), and Richard and Meléndez (1982).

7. For example, Chavarría (1983), Gleijeses (1984), Gorman (1984), Krumwiede (1984), McClintock (1985), Millett (1984a), and Wiarda (1982).

8. For promising theories, see T. Anderson (1982), Berryman (1983), Black (1981), Booth (1984a, 1984b), Booth and Walker (1989), Bowen (1984), Castillo Rivas (1983, 1984), Chamorro (1983), Cohen and Rosenthal (1983), Davis (1983), Dunkerley (1982, 1988), Hoeffel (1984), Kurth (1982), LaFeber (1983), López et al. (1979), Meléndez (1982), Molina Chocano (1983), Montgomery (1982), Schoultz (1983), Smith (1986), Stone (1979, 1983), Torres Rivas (1981, 1983, 1984), Vilas (1986), Villagrán Kramer (1982), Vuskovic (1983), Walker (1981), Walker, ed. (1982a), and Williams (1986).

with the rapid expansion of Central America's rural and industrial proletariats, declining urban and rural real incomes, and increasing concentration of wealth (especially agricultural land). Such problems led the aggrieved to demand change and sparked growing opposition to incumbent regimes by political parties, labor unions, religious community organizers, and revolutionary groups. Violent repression of opposition demands for reform in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala not only failed to suppress mobilization for change but actually helped forge revolutionary coalitions that fought for control of the state.

This approach to the nearly simultaneous rebellions in three Central American nations has by no means become an explanatory paradigm, but it enjoys growing currency. Moreover, it manifests important parallels with more general recent theories on the origin and development of revolutions and major national revolts.

GENERAL THEORIES ON REBELLION AND REVOLUTION

When individuals join rebel movements, some basic source of strong grievances must exist (Kriesberg 1982, 29). Recent theories regard economic factors, especially evolving class relations, as a fundamental source of grievance in great social revolutions (Skocpol 1979, 13), national revolts (Walton 1984), and peasant rebellions (Paige 1975; Wolf 1969). In particular, the entry of agrarian societies into the world capitalist economy by becoming heavily dependent on export agriculture is viewed as a major source of social transformation and grievances. As Walton has observed, "The penetration of global capitalism into precapitalist societies [fosters] export agriculture and an internal market for the consumption of imports [so that] the peripheral economy is unevenly developed, . . . [eventually producing] a massive transformation of the indigenous economy" (Walton 1984, 161–62). Such changes harm large sectors of the peasantry, urban poor, and middle classes and leave many citizens angry.

Political factors also play key roles. The mere existence of aggrieved citizens will not generate overt political conflict, however (Kriesberg 1982, 66–106). Popular mobilization must occur: aggrieved groups must first become aware of their own opposition and then focus their struggle on some target, typically the state or incumbent regime. Popular mobilization alone, however, may be too diffuse or too weak to challenge the state. Effective organization for opposition also requires mobilizing such resources as cadres, cash, arms, communication, and allies (Aya 1979, 41–44; Tilly 1981, 21–23).

Contrary to economically deterministic theories of revolution, recent approaches emphasize the importance of the state in the political process of rebellion. Skocpol (1979) and Walton (1984) concur with Aya and Tilly that the state plays two key roles. First, governments implement

public policy and bring about social change in the course of governing. For example, governments often repress their opponents, which may both generate and focus popular mobilization. Governments represent much more than mere reflections of economic systems—they become actors in the political arena. Second, the state ultimately becomes the target of the organized aggrieved. A widespread and violent contest for sovereignty is the essence of rebellion against an established regime.

The congruencies between these more general theories about revolution and rebellion and the arguments advanced by many Central Americanists suggest several propositions around which the following discussion will be organized. First, expansion of speculative export agriculture (from the 1950s through the 1970s) and rapid capital-intensive industrialization (in the 1960s and 1970s) in Central America created or expanded classes or subclasses of landless agricultural wage laborers, urban subproletarians, proletarians, and white-collar sectors such as commercial and public employees. In the absence of state efforts to mitigate inequity and poverty in society through agrarian reform or wage policies, the nature and rapid rate of Central American economic growth from the 1950s to the 1970s exacerbated inequalities in wealth and real income and reduced the real wages of agricultural and urban wage laborers. Rapidly escalating oil prices and the resulting inflation combined with the deterioration of the Central American Common Market (in the middle and late 1970s) and natural or economic catastrophes to reduce real income and employment sharply among working-class and some white-collar sectors.

Second, the grievances caused by declining income or wealth, catastrophes, and political dissatisfaction among would-be competing elites led to protests against public policy. These grievances also fostered popular mobilization in the forms of agrarian, labor, neighborhood, community self-help, and opposition-party organizations as well as reformist demands on the state.

Third, differing regime responses to organization and protest determined whether national revolts (or revolution in the case of Nicaragua) would occur. Where regimes responded to demands with policies designed to reduce inequalities of wealth and to permit recovery of real wages and with low or modest levels of force or repression, popular mobilization and protests subsided. But where regimes did not pursue ameliorative policies and sharply escalated repression by public security forces, protests and opposition organization increased and national revolts ensued.

COMMON FEATURES OF CENTRAL AMERICAN NATIONS

The nearly simultaneous outbreak of a revolution in Nicaragua and national revolts in El Salvador and Guatemala (three of the five Central

American nations) was not coincidental. It stemmed from many common factors of history, economics, and geopolitics.⁹ These shared factors should be reviewed before examining the data relevant to the theories under discussion.

When Mexico became independent in 1821, Central America's six former colonies briefly joined the Mexican Empire. But when the empire collapsed in 1823, all but Chiapas withdrew and formed the federated Central American Republic. By 1838, however, economic and political conflict destroyed the federation. Throughout most of the isthmus, the military's political role was strengthened by a combination of liberal-conservative factionalism, extensive mineral or agricultural wealth, plentiful indigenous communities for coerced labor, and the emergent hacienda system. Civil institutions developed slowly and weakly while military rule and political violence became the norm. Except in Costa Rica, Central American nations experienced mostly dictatorships between 1840 and 1945. Costa Rica suffered relatively less conflict and less military involvement in politics because of an early conservative victory, scarce mineral wealth, a paucity of Indians who could be subjugated, and few great haciendas.

International pressures on Central America grew after 1850. First Britain and then the United States pursued economic, political, and security objectives in the region, especially the construction of a canal across the isthmus. Direct foreign intervention in Central America increased and exacerbated the propensity of the region's nations to meddle in each other's politics. By 1900 the United States had become the dominant foreign power in Central America. The Panama Canal and U.S. business interests led to extensive direct U.S. military and political intervention through the mid-1930s. After 1945 the United States shifted its emphasis in Central America to containing communism, a goal implemented by aiding anticommunist regimes and engineering the overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 with Central American assistance. The Cuban Revolution reinforced the U.S. preoccupation with containing communism and prompted U.S. support for the Central American Common Market (CACM) through the Alliance for Progress.

In the economic arena, Central American societies have specialized in exporting agricultural commodities since the colonial era. After 1850 coffee dominated regional exports, with bananas, cacao, cotton, and sugar assuming importance in the twentieth century. Each of these products experienced cyclical price swings that spawned periodic severe re-

9. This section draws mainly on Brockett (1988), Camacho et al. (1979), Cardoso and Pérez Brignoli (1977), CSUCA (1978), Delgado (1981), Gudmundson (1986), Menjivar (1974), Pérez Brignoli (1985), Pérez Brignoli and Baires Martínez (1983), Torres Rivas (1971), Weeks (1985a), Williams (1986), and Woodward (1985).

cessions. The spread of coffee production concentrated landownership and established coffee growers, millers, and exporters as dominant national economic and political elites.¹⁰ Industrialization, in contrast, proceeded slowly. Agroexport elites in most countries used the state so tenaciously to oppose socioeconomic reform that one critic has labeled them “reactionary despots” (Baloyra 1983).

Beginning in the 1950s, socioeconomic change accelerated in Central America. National populations doubled between 1960 and 1983, and the proportion of urban-dwellers grew by half or more. Literacy increased notably in Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, although it remained low everywhere except in Costa Rica. Employment increasingly shifted away from agriculture into services and manufacturing. Middle sectors of the population grew with the expansion of education, industry, commerce, and government.¹¹

Underlying such rapid social changes were important shifts in Central American economies and deliberate governmental efforts to promote growth. Two new waves of agroexport production occurred: the intensive cultivation of grains and cotton in the 1950s and 1960s, and extensive cattle-raising in the 1960s and 1970s. Except in Honduras,¹² these trends reduced the smallholding and subsistence agricultural sector of each Central American nation while expanding migrant wage-labor forces. Landownership and agricultural production became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the agroexport sector. Rural labor surpluses developed, swelling migration to cities by unemployable campesinos. Domestic food production shrank and food imports rose, afflicting more and more citizens directly with imported inflation.

Public policy helped accelerate socioeconomic change in the 1960s, following Castro’s rise to power in Cuba and political turmoil in the isthmus. Central American governments in 1960 formed the Central American Common Market, which sought to promote regional economic integration, intraregional trade, foreign investment, and industrialization. It was hoped that the CACM would increase demand and production in the capitalist mode, thus creating new jobs and a better distribution of income. This anticipated trickling down of income was intended to reduce poverty and to undercut the appeal of revolutionary politics as exemplified by Cuba. The Alliance for Progress shared these objectives and

10. Honduras never developed a national landowning aristocracy like those in the other countries. Instead, regional *hacendados* and later urban commercial, financial, and industrial entrepreneurs retained economic and political power (Morris 1984b, 193).

11. Data drawn from IADB (1984, tt. 1, 2, 3, and I-4), Torres Rivas (1982, t. 4), Pérez Brignoli and Bañes Martínez (1983, t. 9), Castillo Rivas (1983, t. 1), Ropp and Morris (1984, t. 1.6), and Nicaragua–Ministerio de Educación (1979, 140–41, 147).

12. In Honduras, agrarian colonization and expanding employment in the modern capitalist sector of agriculture continued to absorb much of the growth of the rural labor force.

TABLE 1 Mean Annual Growth in Gross Domestic Products per Capita in Central American Countries, 1950–1989

Period	Costa Rica (%)	El Salvador (%)	Guatemala (%)	Honduras (%)	Nicaragua (%)	Region ^a (%)
1950–1959	1.9	1.9	0.3	0.9	3.9	1.5
1960–1969	3.5	2.2	2.6	1.8	4.3	2.7
1970–1974	3.0	1.8	3.2	0.6	2.0	2.2
1975–1979	1.6	0.4	2.4	1.0	-6.8	0.4
1980–1984	-2.3	-5.5	-3.1	-2.4	0.2	-2.9
1985–1989	1.0	-0.7	-0.7	0.1	-6.6	-1.2

Sources: CEPAL (1985, t. 2; 1986, t. 3; 1989, t. 3); and Wilkie and Haber (1981, t. 22–3).

^aWeighted mean for period.

together with the CACM greatly increased public investment in Central America. This development in turn stimulated a surge in new private investment. Domestic and foreign investment concentrated in the capital-intensive production of consumer goods that were manufactured mainly with imported raw materials and fuel. Gross domestic products (GDPs) and GDPs per capita grew rapidly into the early 1970s during a period marked by stable input prices and booming industrial production and productivity (see table 1).

The CACM-induced industrial boom did not absorb the rapidly growing labor supply, however, and rural and urban unemployment rose simultaneously throughout the region. During the 1970s, the CACM's import-substitution model began to exhaust its growth potential. Industrial input prices soared while investment and productivity lagged. Markets contracted with higher consumer prices, which led to further unemployment and further shrinkage of demand. In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the industrial sector's share of exports declined markedly (averaging about 6 percent) between 1970–1974 and 1975–1979. Growth slowed from a regional mean annual rate of 2.2 percent per capita for 1970–1974 to a mere 0.4 percent for 1975–1979, with Nicaragua's performance the worst in the region (table 1). The region's mean annual per capita growth rate for 1980–1984 fell further to -2.9 percent. Declining terms of trade, higher interest rates, falling commodity prices, and a world recession together caused a severe imbalance of payments. These problems aggravated internal imbalances within the CACM, causing it effectively to collapse by the end of the 1970s (Weeks 1985a). Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua suffered further economic contraction during the late 1980s (table 1).

Central American nations in the 1970s shared many trends, the most important being a growing concentration of wealth. National bour-

geoisies were prospering greatly, while the middle classes were growing and their living standards were improving. This trend contrasted markedly with increased rural and urban lower-class unemployment and decreased agricultural self-sufficiency among the rural poor.

THE DATA

Despite their important differences, the histories, cultures, and economies of the Central American countries reveal great similarities. They facilitate the comparative study of national revolts by reducing otherwise uncontrollable differences that might confound a comparison of five randomly chosen nations. This fortunate circumstance should increase the internal validity of the following analysis but will also require greater caution in generalizing from the findings.

Available data on Central America have both multiplied and become more reliable since the 1950s. Although comparable data of adequate quality and quantity to permit a definitive examination of each explanatory propositions remain inadequate in some cases, sufficient information exists to enable a suggestive exploration of key relationships and processes.

SOCIOECONOMIC ROOTS OF CLASS CONFLICT

To what extent did the expansion of export-led agriculture and the CACM-driven boom of the 1960s and 1970s create new classes and class relations, increase inequalities in wealth and income, and reduce working-class living standards in Central America? As the CACM boom began to wane in the 1970s, relative and absolute income, employment, and relative wealth eroded among working-class groups in all five Central American nations. Such trends reversed late in the decade in Honduras and Costa Rica, but the problems worsened in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Workers' Real Wages

After a decade of industrialization and rapid growth in general production, the 1973 OPEC oil embargo and subsequent rapid escalation of oil prices drove up consumer prices for the rest of the decade. In Guatemala, for example, the average annual change in the consumer price index (CPI) for 1963–1972 was only 0.7 percent, but it jumped to 12.3

percent for 1973–1979. Similar or even more severe CPI increases also hit the other four nations.¹³

The impact of such inflation on workers' real wages varied markedly within the region.¹⁴ Despite momentary corrections, estimated real wages in each Central American country either began to slide with the mid-1970s inflation or continued downward trends begun in the late 1960s (see table 2). In Honduras and Costa Rica, however, wages recovered much of their purchasing power in the late 1970s. Real wages fell again in Costa Rica in the early 1980s but recovered once more. In sharp contrast, real wages in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala continued to decline through 1980. Indeed, in El Salvador real wages generally continued to fall through 1984. In Guatemala real wages apparently stabilized somewhat in the early 1980s, although they remained well below levels of the early 1970s. This evidence strongly suggests that grievances among affected classes in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala probably intensified steadily throughout the middle and late 1970s while in Costa Rica and Honduras, workers' recovery of their purchasing power probably attenuated such grievances.¹⁵

Employment

Employment failed to keep up with the growth of the work force in Central America during the CACM boom (Camacho et al. 1979). For the region, unemployment is estimated to have increased from 8.1 percent in 1960 to 14.5 percent in 1980 (IICA 1982, 256), and it has risen further since 1980 (Gallardo and López 1986, 189). Experts also believe that underemployment affects from one to five times as much of Central America's economically active population as does unemployment, depending on the country.¹⁶

Table 3 presents unemployment levels for 1970, 1980, and 1984 (note that computational methods vary from country to country, so that cross-national comparisons of raw data should not be made; however,

13. Data from Wilkie and Haber (1981, tt. 2505, 2508, 2509, 2511, 2513), IADB (1983, country profile tables), U.S. Department of State (1985), CEPAL (1986, t. 5; 1989, t. 5); see also Booth (1985, t. 5).

14. Wage indices vary for each nation and do not represent all wages and salaries within any nation (see t. 4 for details). Central American countries report wage data differently, so that no precise equivalency between nations can be assumed. Reported or legal wage rates often overstate actual wages paid, especially in agriculture, making any error in the conservative direction—that is, real disposable income would be lower than estimated.

15. Since 1985, Costa Rican real-wage indices have continued to rise to an index value of 113 for 1989 (with 1972 equaling 100). Data are not yet available on the other Central American countries (CEPAL 1989, t. 5).

16. Underemployment is typically defined as being unable to find full-time work or having to perform wage labor because of insufficient land for family subsistence (Camacho et al. 1979; Infopress Centroamericana 1985d, 18; Gallardo and López 1986, 189).

TABLE 2 Real Working-Class Wage Indices for 1963–1984 (1972 = 100)

Year	Costa Rica	El Salvador ^a	Guatemala ^b	Honduras ^c	Nicaragua ^d
1963	78	96	—	—	81
1965	—	98	102	—	110 ^e
1967	91 ^e	99	107	—	120
1970	93	98	102	—	106
1971	104	99	102	—	104
1972	100	100	100	100	100
1973	97	106	93	104	88
1974	105	104	90	98	88
1975	88	96	89	95	93
1976	100	101	91	106	93
1977	110	90	76	99	85
1978	119 ^e	93	79	105	77
1979	124	89	79 ^e	107	66 ^e
1980	125 ^e	87	79 ^e	101	56 ^e
1981	111 ^e	81 ^f	80 ^e	97 ^f	56 ^e
1982	89 ^e	72 ^f	86 ^e	105 ^f	49 ^e
1983	99 ^e	64 ^f	79 ^e	96 ^f	43 ^e
1984	107 ^e	61 ^f	79 ^e	93 ^f	40 ^e

Sources: Based on Wilkie and Haber (1981, tt. 1400, 1401, 1402, 1403), Wilkie and Perkal (1984, t. 1405), and consumer price data in table 3 of this article. The 1978 and 1979 data for Nicaragua come from Mayorga (1985, 65). Values of the indices represent an unweighted average of wages in manufacturing, construction, transport, storage, and communication, and in agriculture, corrected for consumer price changes except for items under note e, which are wages only for persons included in national social-security systems.

^aExcludes construction (after 1974); data drawn from Wilkie and Perkal (1984, t. 1405).

^bUnweighted average of all sectors reported in Wilkie and Perkal (1984, t. 1405).

^cUnweighted average wages in manufacturing, construction, and agriculture (agricultural wages not included in 1972 and 1973 figures).

^dIncludes wages in manufacturing, transportation (only), and construction.

^eData drawn from Wilkie and Lorey (1987, t. 1413).

^fData drawn from Gallardo and López (1986, 168).

trends within nations are disclosed). Between 1970 and 1980, unemployment rose in every country in Central America except in Honduras, where agrarian reform provided many jobs. In Nicaragua from 1970 through 1978 (the year the insurrection began), unemployment almost tripled from 3.7 percent to 14.5 percent.¹⁷ Overall, by 1984 unemployment had risen only a modest 22 percent in Honduras but had increased by 86 percent in Costa Rica, 88 percent in El Salvador, 89 percent in Guatemala, and a whopping 440 percent in Nicaragua. Costa Rican

17. Booth and Walker (1989, 52).

TABLE 3 *Unemployment Trends, 1970–1989, in Percentages*

Year	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
1970	3.5	16.0 ^a	4.8 ^b	8.8 ^c	3.7
1980	5.9	24.0	5.5	8.8	17.8
1984	6.6	30.0	9.1	10.7	16.3
1989	5.5	—	7.2	9.4	—

Sources: Wilkie and Haber (1981, t. 1308); Gallardo and López (1986, 189); CEPAL (1985, t. 4; 1989, t. 4); and DGEC–Costa Rica (1980, t. 196).

^aThe Salvadoran figure for 1970 is an estimate based on Central American mean unemployment trends (IICA 1982, 256); Salvadoran datum for 1984 from U.S. Department of State data from the Office of Regional Economic Policy, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs.

^bGuatemalan data for 1970 and 1980 from Wilkie and Haber (1981, t. 1308). Figures for 1984 and 1989 from CEPAL (1989, t. 4).

^cValue for 1970 is an estimate projected from economically active population from base years of 1974 and 1977 (Wilkie and Haber 1981, t. 1301). Value is the number of unemployed as a percent of economically active population. Data from 1980 on is taken from CEPAL (1989, t. 4).

unemployment surged sharply between 1981 and 1983 during a recession but returned to pre-1980 levels by 1989.¹⁸

Wealth

Nicaragua / Concentration of landownership increased from the 1950s through the 1970s, especially in the fertile and populous Pacific zone. High cotton prices and the expansion of beef production for export permitted speculating largeholders to squeeze subsistence cultivators off the land and into an already oversupplied wage-labor market (Brockett 1988, 72–74; Castillo Rivas, ed., 1983, 202–5; CSUCA 1978, 204–54; Williams 1986, 52–73, 129–34). As one CIERA study noted, “The process of agricultural development was a concentrator of both land and income” (CIERA 1983, 41). By 1977 the 1.4 percent of farms larger than 350 hectares contained 41.2 percent of the cultivated land, but some sixty thousand campesinos owned no land at all. Small farms (less than four hectares) accounted for 36.8 percent of Nicaragua’s farms but occupied only 1.7 percent of the cultivated land. The wealthiest quintile of the Nicaraguan populace earned 59.9 percent of the national income while the poorer half earned only 15 percent of the national income (CIERA 1983, 40–41). In the 1950s and 1960s, the Nicaraguan government implemented policies that benefited agro-industries belonging to the Somozas and their cohorts.

18. *Ibid.* For additional analysis and data on Central American unemployment, see these sources: for El Salvador, Molina (1979, 245, 254), Orellana (1985, 5–9), and Russell (1984, 76–78); and in general, Gallardo and López (1986, 188–90).

The benefits included "not only financial, trade, and credit policies . . . but also the use of the public budget and institutions to supply them with labor, machinery, electricity, administrators, transport, etc." (Castillo Rivas, ed., 1983, 203).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Nicaragua's three major capitalist factions (which centered around the Banco de América, the Banco Nicaragüense, and the Somoza family interests) began to intertwine their once separate investments (Wheelock Román 1975, 141–98; Barahona Portocarrero 1977, 33–44). Following the Managua earthquake, however, the aggressive expansionism of the Somoza faction began to undermine the relative positions and profits of other investor groups. Moreover, growing political and labor unrest caused many Nicaraguan capitalists to doubt the regime's capacity to promote orderly growth. Anastasio Somoza Debayle's formerly growing backing among the upper classes began to break down during the mid-1970s, thus arresting the development of a unified bourgeoisie.

El Salvador / During the 1970s, wealth concentrated in fewer hands.¹⁹ During the 1950s and 1960s, much of the nation's best agricultural land was converted for capital-intensive cultivation of export crops (mainly cotton), and in the 1970s, beef production for export increased sharply. These changes reduced access to land by subsistence tenants, squatters, and smallholders. During the 1960s, pressure on the land increased dramatically as the overall number of farms grew by 19 percent but the area under cultivation shrank by 8 percent. The 1965 agricultural minimum wage reduced the number of *colonos* and *aparceros* (peasants cultivating for subsistence a plot donated by the owner) by one-third and caused the amount of land so employed to decline by four-fifths (DGEC-El Salvador 1983b, tt. 311–01, 311–02).

Between 1961 and 1971, the amount of land in tiny rented plots (less than two hectares) increased substantially as did the number of renters. The overall number of these small plots grew by one-third, but the amount of land in them increased by only one-fifth, with the average Salvadoran smallholding shrinking from 0.84 to 0.79 hectares. Despite the increase in the number of small plots, the number of landless peasants soared from 12 percent in 1961 to 41 percent in 1971. These changes expanded rural poverty dramatically. It is interesting to observe that between 1961 and 1971, the number and extension of large farms (more than fifty hectares) contracted as many large farmers sold off part of their holdings for capital to invest elsewhere, especially in manufacturing.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Salvadoran workers' share of the

19. See especially Montgomery (1982), Castillo Rivas (1983, 204–7), Russell (1984), Williams (1986, 28–73, 99–151), Brockett (1988, 72–76), and Dunkerley (1982, 87–118).

expanding national income deteriorated while production and investment became more centralized (Orellana 1985, 5–10; Molina 1979, 245–54). The coffee-growing elite had invested roughly four times as much in industry as any other Salvadoran group and had attracted about 8 percent of the foreign capital invested in the country. While the total output of Salvadoran industry more than doubled between 1967 and 1975, the number of firms producing actually diminished by some 10 percent. Víctor Antonio Orellana estimates that from 1971 through 1979, wages and salaries represented 44 percent of national income, while capital accounted for 56 percent of national income as profit, dividends, interest, and rent (Orellana 1985, 5–7). Tommie Sue Montgomery observed, “the old saying that ‘money follows money’ was never truer than in El Salvador. . . . These investment patterns . . . contributed to an ever-greater concentration of wealth” (1982, 94–95). They also belied the developmentalist belief that wealth would “trickle down.” Orellana agrees: “The majority of Salvadorans, excluded from the benefits of that growth, were prevented from adequately satisfying their basic needs” (1985, 6–7).

El Salvador’s capitalist elite grew relatively and absolutely wealthier during the mid-1970s, but this pattern changed abruptly at the end of the decade. The Nicaraguan insurrection disrupted Salvadoran trade and production, coffee prices fell, and extensive Salvadoran domestic political unrest surfaced, together causing a sharp decline in investment. El Salvador’s GDP, which had grown at more than 5 percent per year for five years, declined 3.1 percent in 1979 (a 5.9 percent decline on a per capita basis).²⁰ This reversal clearly harmed the interests of Salvadoran coffee producers, industrial entrepreneurs, and their employees.

Guatemala / Guatemalan data suggest similarly increasing concentration of wealth during the CACM boom.²¹ Landownership had long been unequally distributed in Guatemala, and this pattern was exacerbated by the rapid expansion of cotton and beef production for export in the 1960s and 1970s (Williams 1986, 197–206; Brockett 1988, 72–74). The agrarian census of 1950 reported that farms smaller than five *manzanas* (roughly three and a half hectares) made up three-quarters of the farms but occupied only 9 percent of the cultivated land. The 1.7 percent of farms larger than sixty-four *manzanas* (forty-five hectares) accounted for an astonishing one-half of the cultivated land (Castellano Cambranes 1984, t. 4.2). The 1979 agricultural census revealed that inequality of landownership in Guatemala had become the most extreme in Central America.

20. Booth and Walker (1989, 147).

21. T. Anderson (1982, 19–62), AVANCSO (1988, 13–16), *Mesoamerica* (1982b), Inforpress Centroamericana (1985d), Technical Commission (1985), CSUCA (1978, 77–132), Schultztz (1983, 178–83), and Williams (1986, 28–73, 134–50).

The rapid growth of rural population reduced the availability of arable land from a 1950 level of 1.7 hectares per capita to 0.8 by 1980 (Seligson et al. 1982, 1–18).

In the late 1970s, agrarian wages deteriorated and Indian agrarian unemployment rose. Some communally owned land and private land held by Indians in the highlands was being appropriated by *ladinos* (Guatemala's Hispanic population). This concentration of landownership forced out-migration to cities and to new colonization zones in El Petén and Izabal. But many smallholders in the departments being colonized had their plots taken away, especially by military officers and politicians who were amassing large amounts of land in those zones (Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla 1984, 34–37; Schoultz 1983, 181; Seligson et al. 1982). The poverty of Indian peasants was further aggravated by the 1976 earthquake, which devastated much of the highlands.

Worker productivity in Guatemalan manufacturing grew steadily from the 1950s through the 1970s, yet both real wages and the working and middle classes' shares of national income declined steeply during the 1970s. Thus the main beneficiaries of increasing productivity were foreign and national investors (Noyola 1979). The ownership of industry became steadily more concentrated among a decreasing number of larger firms, and private-sector pressure groups grew bigger and more sophisticated (Adams 1970; Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla 1984, 48–51). Modernization and concentration of ownership displaced many industrial workers.

Although Guatemala's upper classes prospered during most of the 1970s because of the CACM boom and briefly higher coffee prices, conditions began to deteriorate in 1979, when per capita GDP began a real decline that continued into the mid-1980s. Declining export prices, shrinking trade due to political unrest elsewhere in the region, and capital flight all contributed to a sharp general recession that began around 1980 and deepened markedly after 1981. The Guatemalan slump, lagging four years behind Nicaragua's and two years behind El Salvador's, seriously eroded the economic position of Guatemalan economic elites and left them critical of the economic management of the military regimes.

Costa Rica and Honduras / Data on these nations contrast sharply with the marked increases in class inequality occurring in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala during the 1970s. Although Costa Rica and Honduras were members of the CACM and experienced the rapid price increases for energy of the mid-1970s, this trauma impinged on working-class income and wealth for a shorter time than elsewhere in the isthmus.

Costa Rica's social democratic political system and low military expenditures brought that nation into the 1970s with an extensive social welfare system that attenuated the impact of inflation on working-class living conditions. Data comparing Costa Rican spending on social pro-

TABLE 4 Comparison of Central Government Expenditures as a Percentage of Budget

Year	<i>Costa Rica</i>		<i>El Salvador</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>		<i>Honduras</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>
	1978	1983	1984	1978	1984	1976	1976
Defense	2.7	3.0	24.6	11.0	13.7	10.5	12.8
Total % on education, health, and social security/welfare	56.3	56.3	27.3	24.2	24.1	40.1	40.9
Ratio of human services to defense	21:1	19:1	1:1	2:1	2:1	4:1	3:1

Sources: Inforpress Centroamericana (1985a, 5); Wilkie and Haber (1981, t. 2323); and Wilkie and Lorey (1987, t. 3010).

grams with that of other Central American countries appear in table 4. Net Costa Rican spending on education, health, and welfare combined remained comparatively high and rather stable between 1978 and 1983. These policies' positive effects on living conditions are evident in demographic data reported elsewhere (Booth 1984c, 171). Income distribution in Costa Rica became somewhat less unequal during the 1960s and 1970s, preventing a pronounced movement of wealth toward the upper classes like that occurring in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.²² In agriculture, land concentration grew steadily in the 1960s and early 1970s, but the availability of some colonizable land until the late 1960s and the growing banana industry absorbed much of the surplus agricultural work force. Moreover, between 1974 and 1978, Costa Rica developed a successful land-reform program that distributed land to many peasants and staved off deterioration of living standards for many (Brockett 1988, chap. 6; Seligson 1980, 122-70; Williams 1986, 183-88; Barahona Riera 1980, 221-422; Castillo Rivas 1983, 210-13).

Honduras, with the slowest industrial growth rate of the CACM, experienced less severe increases in wealth and income inequality in the 1970s than did Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (T. Anderson 1982, 109-47). As already noted, working-class wages recovered from inflation in the late 1970s and income distribution did not sharply disfavor wage and salary earners. Honduran public spending's overall ratio of human services to defense (table 4) was one-third higher than Nicaragua's, double that of Guatemala, and four times that of El Salvador in the late 1970s. Rural unemployment remained rather stable because Honduran regimes

22. Céspedes (1979, t. 6), Céspedes et al. (1986, t. 20), Felix (1983), Inforpress Centroamericana (1985d, 19), Wilkie and Haber (1981, t. 1404), Booth (1985, chap. 5), and DeFranco and Chamorro (1979, t. 2).

vigorously promoted export agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s, and colonizable agricultural land continued to be available until the late 1970s. Widespread peasant organization and mobilization during the 1960s and 1970s led the government to distribute more than one hundred seventy thousand hectares to roughly 10 percent of Honduran landless and land-poor campesino families between 1975 and 1979 (*Mesoamerica* 1982c, 8–9; 1982d, 7; Castillo Rivas 1983, 199–201; Posas 1981, 34–42; Meza 1982, 19–29; Ruhl 1984; Williams 1986, 179–83; Brockett 1988, chap. 6). Although the Honduran agrarian reform achieved only one-quarter of its goal, it still represented a major transfer of wealth toward campesinos. Since 1980 peasant organizations, facilitated by legislation passed in the 1970s, have invaded much additional land in what amounts to an informal or quasi-legal redistribution program.²³

Summary / Throughout Central America, the rapid growth of extensive, export-oriented agriculture and the CACM industrialization boom produced sharp and fairly quick deterioration of real wages among urban and rural workers and certain middle-sector groups during the 1970s. In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, these factors (aided by natural and economic disasters) compounded growing unemployment, redistributed wealth and income away from the poor and toward the wealthy, and lowered living standards for a majority of citizens. Late in the 1970s, a recession began to erode the security and return on investments of the upper classes of these three countries. In marked contrast, despite rapid inflation in the mid-1970s, redistributive public policies in Honduras and Costa Rica permitted the wages of working-class citizens to recover and appeared to make income distribution either slightly less inequitable or at least not sharply worse. Although much of the specific evidence presented is not strictly comparable cross-nationally, strikingly similar changes appear to have taken place in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, in marked contrast with the cases of Honduras and Costa Rica.

Popular Mobilization

As the theoretical discussion has suggested, did declining income and wealth, natural catastrophes, and dissatisfactions among competing elites contribute to popular mobilization, reformist demands on Central American governments, and protests of public policies in the 1970s? As the ranks of the aggrieved in Central America increased due to socio-economic conditions, the number of organizations and their activities

23. Author's conversation with Lucas Aguilera, member of the executive committee of the Unión Nacional Campesina in Tegucigalpa and with members of the Unión Marañita cooperative farm in the Departamento Francisco Morazán, Honduras, 21 Aug. 1985.

multiplied. Ordinary citizens typically first attempted easier, more acceptable actions (community self-help, petitioning government, organizing) before turning to more confrontational, higher-risk actions like protests, strikes, or support for armed resistance.²⁴

*Nicaragua*²⁵ / The decline of working-class wages in the late 1960s and early 1970s revitalized the nation's long suppressed industrial labor movement, which stepped up organizing and used work stoppages and strikes to seek wage gains between 1973 and 1975. The decline of middle-class living standards also led to considerable unionization and strikes among white-collar workers like health workers and teachers. Meanwhile, Catholic social workers, missionaries, and priests had begun organizing unions among peasant wage laborers in the Pacific zone. Clergy also organized small groups of the urban and rural poor into Christian base communities (*comunidades eclesiales de base*, or CEBs) for catechism and community self-help in the late 1960s. After 1975 the peasant union movement gained great momentum.

Peasant unions increasingly pressed for wage gains, and CEBs called for better urban services and housing. After the Managua quake, CEBs and Protestant self-help groups among the urban poor proliferated rapidly. Economic decline stimulated the formation of Nicaraguan private-sector pressure organizations and fueled their increasing calls for political and economic reform, especially after 1974. For example, the Unión Democrática de Liberación, an association headed by business leaders, appeared in 1974. Such private-sector groups as the Instituto Nicaragüense de Desarrollo (INDE) promoted working-class cooperatives. New opposition political parties (the Christian Democrats and Social Christians) also became increasingly active in Nicaragua in the 1960s and 1970s, and new anti-Somoza factions of the old Conservative and Liberal parties appeared during the 1970s. Student opposition to the regime also swelled during the 1970s. The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), the only rebel group to survive out of some twenty that had appeared between 1959 and 1962, greatly expanded its links with university student groups during the 1970s.

*El Salvador*²⁶ / Although the military's Partido Revolucionario de Uni-

24. See Chaffee (1979, 12-17).

25. Material on Nicaragua from Black (1981, 70-72), Chavarria (1982, 28-29), Walker (1985, 20), López C. et al. (1979, 98-112), CIDAMO (1979, 171-76), Booth (1982, chaps. 6-7), Menjívar, Kam, and Portuguez (1985c), Dodson and O'Shaughnessy (1990, 116-39), and Dodson and Montgomery (1982, 163-74).

26. Drawn from Brockett (1988, 146-56), Cabarrus (1985), Montgomery (1982), Dunkerley (1982, 90-102; 1988, 335-424), Cáceres Prendes (1982, 97-111), Russell (1984, 71-78), Guerra (1980, 103-8), Baloyra (1982, 43-52), and Menjívar (1982, 115-62).

ficación Democrática-Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PRUD-PCN) controlled the national government continuously, new opposition parties representing the entire ideological spectrum appeared during the 1960s. In early signs of growing opposition, two reformist parties developed, the Social Democrats' Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR) in 1959 and the Social Christians' Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) in 1960. The leftist coalition Unión Democrática Nacionalista (UDN) formed in 1967. The PDC and MNR briefly formed a legislative coalition with dissident deputies from the ruling PCN in the late 1960s. This coalition anticipated a major reform push by the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO), an electoral coalition of the MNR, UDN, and PDC. UNO's presidential candidates reportedly won both the 1972 and 1977 elections but were defrauded by the ruling regime.

A plethora of unions, self-help organizations, peasant leagues, and other organizations sprang up during the late 1960s and the 1970s, many promoted by the Catholic Church and by political parties. Membership in labor unions among proletarians and middle-class workers rose steadily from the late 1960s, reaching forty-four thousand in 1970 and seventy-one thousand by 1977. Several unions, especially those representing public employees, became more militant in their wage demands during this period (Russell 1984, 71). Industrial disputes rose dramatically in 1974 in response to badly deteriorated wages. Such disputes diminished in 1975-76, when wages improved briefly, but escalated again in 1977-78 as inflation undermined living standards. Cooperatives more than doubled to 543 between 1973 and 1980 (DGEC-El Salvador 1983b) and then increased more gradually to 590 by 1983 (DGEC-El Salvador 1985b, t. 461-01).

As in Nicaragua, Catholic CEBs spread widely throughout urban and rural poor neighborhoods. In the 1970s, Salvadoran CEBs increasingly pressed demands for political and economic reform on the government. Development programs sponsored by the Catholic Church, the PDC, and others swelled the numbers of working-class organizations in El Salvador during the 1960s and early 1970s. Many peasant organizations also sprang up during this era, encouraged partly by the modest proposals for land reform put forth by the regime of Colonel Arturo Armando Molina. Peasant leagues demanded higher agricultural wages and land reform. Several broad coalitions formed, the first being the Frente de Acción Popular Unida (FAPU), which in 1974 grew out of labor unions, peasant organizations, university student groups, a teachers' association, and the Communist party. Five Salvadoran guerrilla organizations emerged between 1970 and 1979 to mount an armed challenge to the government. Between 1974 and 1979, each guerrilla group formally coalesced with unions and other popular organizations.

Guatemala / The 1954 coup d'état ended the democratic regimes that had governed Guatemala since 1944. The extremely repressive counter-revolutionary regime installed by the coup dismantled social and economic reforms and also terrorized supporters of the previous governments. Although Marxist guerrilla opposition to the conservative regime arose in 1962, it was curtailed sharply in the late 1960s by extreme general repression and counterinsurgency (Booth 1980). Popular mobilization renewed in Guatemala during the late 1970s but lagged somewhat behind levels in Nicaragua and El Salvador due to heavier regime repression.²⁷ The decline of manufacturing wages in the early 1970s eventually led to a marked increase in unionization and industrial disputes during the government of General Kjell Laugerud García (1974–1978). But the relaxation of repression of labor in 1978 led to a wave of strikes. Moreover, the damage caused by the 1976 earthquake to lower-class housing helped mobilize slum dwellers into two confederations that later organized a 1978 transport strike and pressed for housing assistance.

As had occurred in El Salvador and Nicaragua, numerous Christian base communities appeared in poor rural and urban Guatemala during the early 1970s. The CEBs organized campesinos into making demands and also developed community and labor groups among Guatemala's long quiescent Indian populace as the decade closed. Prior to that time, the Christian Democratic party had promoted a labor union movement and hundreds of agrarian cooperatives during the 1960s in order to increase its base constituency.

Political parties, factions, and coalitions proliferated rapidly in Guatemala in the 1970s and early 1980s (Rosada Granados 1986, n.d.). But high-ranking military officers maintained control of the presidency through the rightist Partido Institucional Democrático (PID) and the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN). Reform-oriented political parties of the Center and Left, led by the Christian Democrats, were denied election victories when the military regimes manipulated election returns in 1974, 1978, and 1982. Meanwhile, popular confidence in the government ebbed, and rates of electoral abstention rose steadily from 44 percent of registered voters in 1966 to 64 percent in the 1978 national election (Rosada Granados 1985, 41; *Mesoamerica* 1982a, 8; Roggensack and Booth 1985, app. B; Trudeau 1984). After the 1982 election fraud became evident, younger army officers began a cautious reform by ousting the outgoing president General Romeo Lucas García and installing General Efraín Ríos Montt as president.

27. This material was drawn mainly from Sierra Pop (1982, 66–86), Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla (1984, 61–108), T. Anderson (1982, 19–60), Inforpress Centroamericana (1985d, 8–11), Fried et al. (1983, 151–316), Americas Watch (1988a, 1–13), Arias (1985, 62–118), Brockett (1988, 104–12), and Jiménez (1985, 293–342).

*Costa Rica*²⁸ / Popular mobilization appears to have increased markedly in Costa Rica during the 1970s. Although industrial, service, and white-collar unions of public employees were divided among competing party-affiliated confederations, union membership overall grew throughout the 1970s. Industrial disputes rose sharply during 1975–76, when real wages went down, but subsided when wages rallied. In the 1970s, government social promoters organized many communal self-help organizations. The political party system of Costa Rica, however, changed little in the 1960s and 1970s. The social democratic Partido de Liberación Nacional (PLN) remained the strongest force and alternated in power with the Unity coalition of moderate conservative parties. Radical leftist parties never won more than five of the fifty-seven seats in the Legislative Assembly and remained weak elsewhere except for the union movement. The church engaged in little political activism or popular mobilization during this era.

*Honduras*²⁹ / Popular mobilization generally increased during the 1960s and 1970s. The greatest growth in unionization occurred among peasant wage workers and landless peasants who were organized into land occupation movements by several federations. The Honduran Catholic Church, unlike its counterparts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, played only a modest role in mobilizing such rural activism in the 1960s and then generally retreated from even that degree of involvement in the 1970s. The traditional Liberal and Nationalist parties remained out of power during military rule from 1963 through 1982, and two small new parties developed during the 1970s. Business and private-sector groups multiplied and became more active in pressing policy demands on the Honduran state during the 1960s and 1970s.

Summary / As expected, all five Central American nations experienced increased mobilization by working-class and middle-class groups in the 1960s and 1970s, an era of great economic change and shifting distribution of income and wealth. Political parties remained fairly stable in Costa Rica and Honduras while major new parties formed, factions split off, and coalitions developed among extant parties in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The Catholic Church played a much less important role in mobilization in Costa Rica and Honduras than in the other three nations.

28. Based on Backer (1978, 135–207), Blanco and Navarro (1984), Booth (1984c, 1987, 1989), Booth and Seligson (1979), Lederman, Torales, and Trejos (1979), Fernández Vázquez (1982), Dunkerley (1988, 589–648), and Menjivar, Kim, and Portuguez (1985a).

29. Material drawn from Ropp (1984, 241–45), Meza (1980, 121–67; 1982, 14–41), T. Anderson (1982, 109–21), Dunkerley (1988, 525–80), Menjivar, Kim, and Portuguez (1985b), Morris (1984a, 168–93), Pochet Coronado (1982), Posas (1981), and Brockett (1988, chap. 6).

Government Response to Popular Mobilization and Its Effect on Opposition

Central American regimes responded to popular mobilization in the 1970s in distinctive ways.

Costa Rica / Costa Rica's open, constitutional government was characterized by electoral honesty and considerable popular access to public officials. The government generally responded to mobilized demands by accommodating initiatives of pressure groups. Real wages in Costa Rica have fluctuated, but after sharp declines (in the mid-1970s and early 1980s) and an increase in labor disputes in 1979–80, wages were permitted to recover (see table 2). When demands escalated into confrontation (including civil disobedience, demonstrations, strikes, and riots), the Costa Rican government responded by studying complaints and compromising in order to defuse conflict. Even violent civil disturbances—the land invasions in the early 1970s, the Limón riot of 1979, and banana workers' strikes in 1980, 1981, and 1982—were met with modest official force that made deaths very rare (Booth 1984c, 173–76; 1985, 39–40; 1987; Seligson 1980, 105–14; U.S. Department of State 1981b, 391–96).

Costa Rica's severe economic crisis in the early 1980s modestly eroded public approval of the government, but support for the constitutional regime remained high (Seligson and Muller 1985; Seligson and Gómez 1989). Efforts to forge a general nationwide labor confederation failed, leftist party and labor groups splintered, and leftist parties actually attracted fewer votes in the 1982 and 1986 elections. Overall, mobilization of demands by a broad array of groups increased, and some terrorism was perpetrated by tiny conspiratorial groups often connected with foreign conflicts. In 1985 the traditional Unity coalition of conservative parties was reorganized under the banner of the Partido Unidad Social Cristiano (PUSC). Despite internal strains following its loss in 1986, the PUSC won the 1990 election. Otherwise, opposition organization or coalition formation did not increase significantly in the late 1970s or 1980s (Gudmundson 1985, 499–508; Booth 1985, 1989). Nor was any meaningful challenge mounted to the sovereignty of the state.

Honduras / Honduras operated under military rule most of the time from 1963 through 1982. The populist military government of General Osvaldo López Arellano (1971–1975) accommodated burgeoning campesino mobilization and implemented an agrarian reform program. In 1975, however, a conservative faction of the armed forces led by Colonel Juan Alberto Melgar Castro deposed López. Labor repression then increased, punctuated by a massacre of fourteen protesters at Los Horcones in 1975. But when army officers were implicated in the massacre, they were tried in civilian courts, convicted, and imprisoned (Millett 1984b,

47). Violent regime repression of opponents (illegal detentions, disappearances, and killings) increased significantly in the early 1980s but remained moderate by Central American standards. Meanwhile, political parties, unions, peasant leagues, and a free press operated openly and probably restrained human rights violations by vigorously denouncing government abuses of authority (U.S. Department of State 1981b, 466–71; Morris 1984a, 192–93; 1984b, 217–19; T. Anderson 1982, 116–32).

An important event occurred in Honduras when the armed forces decided to return power to civilians. President General Policarpo Paz García was persuaded to hold elections for a constituent assembly in 1980 by a combination of factors: disaffection among the military's traditional allies in the National party, blatant corruption of the military regimes, growth of popular unrest in the middle and late 1970s, and encouragement from U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The Honduran military actually confounded most expectations in several ways. It accepted the Liberal party's victory in that election. The army permitted traditional parties (including the Liberals' social democratic left wing) as well as two new parties (the Partido de Innovación y Unidad and the Partido Demócrata Cristiano) to take part in the 1981 presidential election, which was relatively clean. When Liberal presidential candidate Roberto Suazo Córdova won a clear majority in 1981, the military allowed him to take power. The same approach was used with his Liberal party successor, José Azcona Hoyo, in 1986 (Morris 1984b, 201–4, Rosenberg 1989).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, several small leftist guerrilla groups appeared in Honduras: the Frente Morazanista para la Liberación de Honduras (FMLH), the Movimiento Popular de Liberación (MPL, also known as the "Chichoneros"), the Fuerzas Populares Revolucionarias "Lorenzo Zelaya" (FPR), and the Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTCH) (Ropp 1984). Beginning in 1979, these groups conducted several independent guerrilla actions. In 1983 they formed the Dirección Nacional de Unidad (DNU) to coordinate their activities. Overall, however, insurgent violence in Honduras remained minimal when compared with neighboring countries. To curtail the guerrillas, the military stepped up counterinsurgency efforts and in several areas formed rural militias known as Comités de Defensa Civil (CDCs). In the early 1980s, rightists (apparently including some Nicaraguan exiles and elements of the Honduran military intelligence) began to kidnap, murder, and torture suspected subversives and critics of the government (Americas Watch 1983, 55; Human Rights Watch 1989, 75–79; LASA 1988, 23–26). These practices subsided somewhat in the mid-1980s but continued into 1990. Despite such abuses, political repression and human rights violations in Honduras stayed well below the levels observed in El Salvador and Guatemala.

In summary, both Costa Rica and Honduras at least partly amelio-

rated the growing inequalities affecting working-class victims of rapid economic change while employing low or moderate levels of repression. Although the specific public policies of Costa Rica and Honduras during the 1970s and early 1980s differed sharply in details, their net effect was similar: they permitted working-class wages to recover their previous purchasing power and shifted some wealth and income to certain lower-class groups. A particularly significant difference between the cases involved political repression, which was very low in Costa Rica but much higher in Honduras under military as well as civilian governments. The Honduran military nevertheless voluntarily transferred control of executive and legislative power to a constitutional civilian regime, a reform that had enormous symbolic significance.

Thus although Costa Rica and Honduras differed in many respects, political elites and the governments in both made modest concessions to working-class needs and curtailed (at least partially in Honduras) extreme repression of popular mobilization. This approach apparently kept their civilian electoral regimes stable. Moderate conservative opposition parties were elected to power in Honduras and Costa Rica in clean elections in 1990. At that juncture, the united leftist political-military organizations of Honduras (the DNU) still lacked support from a broad general coalition of other political groups. Until such support develops, both the Honduran and Costa Rican cases should reinforce the expectation that revolts are least likely to occur where governments respond to mobilization with even very modest reform and restraint in using repression.

*Nicaragua*³⁰ / In December 1974, Anastasio Somoza Debayle declared a state of siege following an embarrassing hostage-taking by the FSLN. Thus began a three-year reign of terror that took several thousand lives in rural Nicaragua and eventually spread to urban areas. Following the assassination of opposition newspaper editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in January 1978, bourgeois elements began to desert and even to oppose the regime. Key business interests like the Consejo Superior de la Iniciativa Privada (COSIP) joined with unions and moderate forces in supporting general strikes and forming the Frente Amplio Opositor (FAO), which sought to negotiate an end to the Somoza regime before the FSLN could overthrow it. In late 1978, the National Guard brutally crushed spontaneous and FSLN-led popular revolts in several cities. The FSLN, which had been split for several years over tactics, realized that popular outrage at the guard's atrocities had doomed the regime and rendered internal differences moot. The three FSLN factions reunified quickly in early 1979 and launched their own offensive: the Sandinistas built a network of

30. This section was drawn primarily from Booth (1985, 127–82). See also Vilas (1986, 49–126) and Black (1981, 75–184).

prominent citizens (the Grupo de los Doce) to oppose Somoza publicly, forged two broad antiregime coalitions (the Movimiento Pueblo Unido and the Frente Patriótico Nacional) that included virtually all the opposition forces in Nicaragua, and rapidly built up the FSLN's military strength. In early 1979, a provisional government was formed in Costa Rica, thus formalizing the opposition's revolutionary claim to sovereignty.

El Salvador / After 1970, regimes of the Partido de Conciliación Nacional increasingly repressed burgeoning popular mobilization.³¹ The rightist paramilitary Organización Democrática Nacionalista (ORDEN) had formed in the late 1960s, with direct ties to public security forces. Its thousands of peasant recruits, most of whom were former soldiers, served as an anti-communist militia and repressed popular organizers and regime opponents, often by assassinating them. As the first guerrilla actions took place and labor and peasant organization grew after 1973, regular security forces began to operate their own terror squads, who kidnapped, tortured, and murdered labor leaders, Catholic social activists (including clergy), students, and opposition party leaders and activists.

Repression in El Salvador became so severe in the late 1970s and early 1980s that it sharply boosted official mortality statistics. Levels of violence jumped after falling wages led to an outburst of increased labor disputes between 1977 and 1979. The government's own tally of violent deaths reported in official statistical abstracts doubled from normal background levels of an average of less than nine hundred murders per year for 1965–66 to an average of eighteen hundred in 1977 and 1978. They then skyrocketed to more than eleven thousand deaths in 1980 and nine thousand in 1981. Violent deaths then declined to fifty-four hundred in 1982, forty-five hundred in 1983, and twenty-two hundred in 1984.³² The number of political murders per year reported by one Catholic human rights agency increased from about fourteen per year for 1972 to 1977 to three hundred per year for 1977–78 and to more than a thousand by 1979.³³ The number of political murders shot up to eight thousand for 1980 and thirteen thousand for 1981 then declined to roughly six thousand per year in 1982 and 1983.

After the first major wave of political murders in the mid-1970s,

31. See McClintock (1985, 156–209) and for details on the rise of repression in El Salvador. See also Inforpress Centroamericana (1984, 23), Barry and Preusch (1986, 204–19), LASA (1988), and Americas Watch (1988b, 1–8).

32. Taken from DGEC–El Salvador, *Anuario Estadístico* for the years 1965, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1971, and 1977 through 1984; the datum is the total number of "homicides" plus other unexplained violent deaths (excluding accidents); and DGEC–El Salvador (1966, 1967, 1969, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983a, 1984, 1985a, 1986).

33. Based on data reported in Baloyra (1982, 190), White (1984, 44), and Inforpress Centroamericano (1984, 23).

four large opposition coalitions formed, each one linking several labor, peasant, and student groups to one of the guerrilla organizations: the Frente de Acción Popular Unificada (FAPU), formed in 1974; the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (BPR) in 1975; the Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero (LP-28) in 1978; and the Movimiento de Liberación Popular (MLP) in 1979. By joining together and allying with armed rebels, the constituent groups of the opposition coalitions committed themselves to revolutionary action. The coup on 15 October 1979 temporarily allied several former opposition parties with reformist military and business factions, but the junta failed to rein in escalating official violence or to implement meaningful reforms. Moreover, rightists expelled reformers from the junta, prompting the social democratic MNR and about half of the Christian Democrats to break with the regime. In 1980 the five guerrilla groups fused into the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). Several other parties and mass organizations formed the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR), which then allied with the FMLN to adopt a revolutionary platform and mount a full-scale challenge to the sovereignty of Salvadoran government (Montgomery 1982, 140–57).

*Guatemala*³⁴ / Counterrevolutionary regimes heavily repressed Guatemalan labor activists, students, peasant groups, Indians, and opposition parties in the middle and late 1950s. Repressive activities relaxed somewhat during the early 1960s but escalated sharply after Marxist guerrilla groups appeared in 1962. Repression increased especially during the administration of civilian Julio Méndez Montenegro (1966–1970). Forms of repression included terrorism by private and governmental death squads (which claimed dozens of victims each month) and an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign that took several thousand lives and decimated the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) and the Frente Guerrillera Edgar Ibarra (FGEI). During the military regimes of Colonels Carlos Arana Osorio (1970–1974) and Kjell Laugerud García (1974–1978), terror gradually escalated against unions, parties, peasant organizations, and cooperatives.

Laugerud nevertheless encouraged the development of rural cooperatives and momentarily relaxed the repression of unions, which brought a sharp upswing in labor disputes in 1978. Victims of the 1976 earthquake became politically restive, and fraudulent manipulation of the 1978 presidential election further stimulated political opposition and demands for reform. Peasant organizations led by the Comité de Unidad Campesina

34. Material in this section was taken mainly from Aguilera Peralta, Romero Imery et al. (1981), Americas Watch (1982, 1985, 1987, 1988a), Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla (1984, 61–112), Human Rights Watch (1989, 61–66), Booth et al. (1985), Bowen (1984), Rosada Granados (n.d., 34–76), and Simon (1897).

(CUC) increased their organizing and staged a major strike against sugar planters in 1980. Meanwhile, the military's Partido Institucional Democrático (PID) candidate, General Romeo Lucas García, was fraudulently installed as president (1978–1982). He sharply escalated repression against all manner of regime critics, including dozens of national and local party leaders of the Democratic Socialists, Christian Democrats, and the Frente Unido Revolucionario. Hundreds of union leaders, university faculty, and student leaders were killed or disappeared. Guatemalan political murders,³⁵ nearly all of which have been attributable to government security forces and rightist death squads, increased from an average of thirty per month in 1971 to seventy-five per month in 1979, peaking at nearly two hundred per month in 1982.³⁶ The political murder rate then declined substantially to thirty-five to fifty assassinations per month for 1983 through 1987.

Between 1978 and 1980, the regrouped FAR, the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP), and a new guerrilla group called the Organización del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA) renewed armed action in the Western highlands. The EGP and ORPA attracted widespread popular participation and support from the indigenous population. Estimates placed guerrilla strength at four thousand by 1982. Fearing the new insurgency and worrying that regime corruption would undermine the military's corporate interests, younger officers in 1982 ousted General Lucas and installed General Efraín Ríos Montt as president. These officers implemented a two-part program. One part consisted of a gradual military-managed transformation of the state. This restructuring included revising the constitution, replacing the eccentric Ríos Montt with General Humberto Mejía Víctores in a 1983 coup d'état, conducting electoral reforms, reducing human rights abuses in urban areas, and reestablishing a civilian presidency (1982–1986). The process culminated in the election of Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo as president in 1985 (Booth et al. 1985; Carliner et al. 1988; Painter 1987, 58–115; Rosada Granados n.d.; Simon 1987, 193–247).

The second part of the military's program in Guatemala was the launching of a major counterinsurgency campaign against the guerrillas and their Indian supporters.³⁷ In that campaign, the army massacred

35. Data for selected periods drawn from U.S. Embassy Guatemala reports for 1966 through 1984, reported in Booth (1980), Roggensack and Booth (1985), U.S. Department of State (1981b, 441) and 1985 data from the Office of Regional Economic Policy, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Later data come from Inforpress Centroamericana (1985b, 31; 1985c, 357; 1988, 12).

36. Bear in mind that these tabulations exclude kidnappings, disappearances, and massacres by the armed forces in the countryside and that they have a general bias toward urban areas.

37. Sources are author's field observations in Guatemala in Sept.–Oct. 1985, Apr. 1987, Jan. 1988, and Sept. 1988; also Americas Watch (1982, 1985, 1988a), Anderson (1989), Painter

several entire villages, committed numerous atrocities against suspected guerrilla supporters, and forced widespread relocation and concentration of Indians. The army also impressed most rural males in the highlands into mandatory "civil defense patrols," undertook major economic development projects using relocated peasant labor, and assumed virtually complete control of governmental and economic development activities in much of rural Guatemala. Estimates of the death toll from this program between 1982 and 1985 range as high as one hundred and fifty thousand persons.³⁸ The counterinsurgency war, which continued into 1990, has made internal or external refugees of at least half a million Guatemalans, most of them Indians. While transferring nominal control of the executive to the civilian government, the Guatemalan military has also legally exculpated itself for its human rights abuses and continued to discourage the promotion of human rights as well as any investigation or prosecution of those who have abused human rights.

In response to such repression, Guatemalan opposition groups attempted to forge coalitions to enhance their power and resource base (Black, Jamail, and Chinchilla 1984, 107–9). The Frente Democrática contra la Represión (FDCR) was forged in 1979 from several unions, the FDR, and the Frente Unida de la Revolución (FUR). Some more radical elements of the FDCR split away in 1981 to form the Frente Popular 13 de Enero (FP-13). In 1982 the FP-13 and the FDCR endorsed a new coalition, the Comité Guatemalteco de Unidad Patriótica (CGUP). In 1982 the nation's guerrilla groups united into the Unión Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca (URNG), which openly challenged the regime's sovereignty. Further efforts to unify the opposition stagnated, however, as the return to civilian rule coaxed some opposition groups back into the legal political arena, the Central American peace process divided the URNG, and labor unions resisted establishing political links outside the labor field.³⁹

Summary / These findings generally confirm the predictions about ameliorative policies and repression. As expected, where the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan regimes responded to popular mobilization with heavy repression, opposition organization grew and progressively broader coalitions formed. In Guatemala the 1985 elections, restoration of nominal civilian rule, and partial abatement of urban political repression have at least interrupted opposition unification. Whether Guatemala's

(1987), Parliamentary Human Rights Group (1985), Rosada Granados (n.d.), Simon (1987), and Washington Office on Latin America (1988).

38. These deaths are rarely included in the casualty tallies kept by the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala because they cannot be easily verified by embassy staff. The source is the author's conversation with U.S. Embassy personnel in Guatemala City, September 1985.

39. Author's interviews with Guatemalan labor sources, Sept.–Oct. 1985, Apr. 1987, Jan. 1988, Guatemala City.

recent reformism will arrest opposition mobilization and unification permanently or only momentarily in the presence of continuing high levels of repression is one of the most interesting empirical questions regarding Central American politics.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence strongly suggests that Central America's rapid growth of export agriculture after 1950 and industrialization after 1960 markedly reduced the relative and absolute living standards of many members of the working class, who then mobilized to demand redress of their grievances. Where the state responded accommodatingly and with limited repression (in Costa Rica and Honduras), opposition mobilization stagnated or subsided. Where the state did not ameliorate growing inequality and employed heavy repression (in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala), opposition mobilization and unity increased and led to a broad, rebellious challenge to regime sovereignty.

These findings, examined in light of both general theories of revolution and rebellion and Central Americanists' explanations of regional turmoil, suggest five related hypotheses for future research.

First, the expansion of speculative export agriculture (from the 1950s through the 1970s) and rapid capital-intensive industrialization (in the 1960s and 1970s) in Central America created or expanded classes or subclasses of landless agricultural wage laborers, urban subproletarians, proletarians, and white-collar sectors such as commercial and public employees.

Second, in the absence of concerted state efforts to ameliorate inequalities within society (by such means as agrarian reform or wage policies), Central America's rapid economic growth during the 1950s and 1970s increased inequalities in wealth and real income and reduced the real wages of agricultural and urban wage laborers.

Third, rapidly escalating oil prices and resultant inflation, the deterioration of the Central American Common Market (in the middle and late 1970s), and natural or economic catastrophes sharply reduced real income and employment among working-class and some white-collar sectors.

Fourth, grievances caused by declining income or wealth, catastrophes, and political dissatisfaction among would-be competing elites fostered popular mobilization in the form of agrarian, labor, neighborhood, community self-help, and opposition-party organizations as well as reformist demands on the state and protests against public policy.

Fifth, differing regime responses to organization and protest determined whether national revolts would occur. Where regimes responded to demands with ameliorative policies (for reducing inequalities of wealth

and permitting recovery of real wages) and with low or modest levels of force or repression, popular mobilization and protests subsided. Where regimes did not implement ameliorative policies and sharply escalated repression by public security forces, protests and opposition organization increased and national revolts occurred.

Although the point is not explored here, it seems clear that the political processes of mobilizing opposition resources and the state's response to challenges to its sovereignty will eventually determine the outcome of the Central American conflicts. Two subjects in particular warrant further study. The first is the critical process by which popular forces—especially opposition organizations—have formed, become committed to challenging the regimes, mobilized resources, and coalesced with other similar groups. The second question centers on the roles played by external actors (major powers, regional and extraregional powers, and neighboring states) in organizing, mobilizing resources (money, intelligence, technology, arms, training, and advice), and altering the ultimate balance of force between regimes and rebels.

After reviewing the political economy of Central American national revolts, one is struck by the modesty of the reforms and redistributive measures that purchased stability in Costa Rica and Honduras through the mid-1980s. Neither government performed radical redistributive surgery, but each did shift small amounts of wealth toward the poor and each contrived a recovery of working-class wages. Both governments restrained themselves from brutally repressing their opponents and the aggrieved, although such restraint was relative in Honduras, low only when compared with the horrific standards of neighboring nations.

These kinds of accommodation and co-optation of opponents were rejected by the elites of Nicaragua under the Somozas and those in El Salvador. In hindsight, to have followed a strategy of popular accommodation appears less costly to all concerned than having to suppress a national revolt later via massive repression, counterinsurgency warfare, and crisis reform—or being overthrown. The military-dominated politico-economic elite in Guatemala, having also rejected popular accommodation for much of the period under study, appears to have learned at least a partial lesson from the course of events in El Salvador and Nicaragua and from the military's disgrace in Argentina. The Guatemalan regime shifted to a more accommodationist strategy (although violent repression remains intense), although the outcome of such Tory reformism is still much in doubt. Three coup attempts from the far Right and younger military officers in 1988 and 1989 bespeak the fragility of the Guatemalan experiment as President Cerezo's term draws to an end.

One may also ask whether the Contra rebellion against Nicaragua's Sandinista regime—now dwindling under the new Chamorro government—constituted a true national revolt. Has it been a spontaneous

movement driven by the same kinds of economic problems and political grievances that inspired the revolt against Somoza and the rebellions in El Salvador and Guatemala? Or has the Contra rebellion represented something less that was mainly manufactured by the United States and its extensive financial and political assistance? At first glance, U.S. aid to the Contra movement appears to have far exceeded any outside support ever received by leftist insurgents in the three Central American rebellions examined here. But the Sandinista Revolution's own policies and problems generated opponents, first and most notably among the Miskito Indians. The post-1980 decline in working-, middle-, and upper-class living conditions in revolutionary Nicaragua was severe. This economic erosion may well have combined with the regime's escalated repression after 1982 to drive others to support the armed opposition irrespective of U.S. involvement.

It is true that the Sandinistas mounted a successful military response to the Contras and made several reforms: accommodation of the internal opposition, increased autonomy for the Atlantic zone, the 1984 and 1990 elections, political concessions under the Central American peace process, extensive land redistribution, and improved human rights performance. But despite these efforts, a large majority of Nicaraguans voted for the UNO coalition (Unión Nacional Opositora) in February 1990 and brought the Sandinista Revolution to an end (LASA 1990). The Central American peace process helped make the 1990 election almost the only means by which the FSLN could be removed from power. U.S. low-intensity strategy of warfare nevertheless caused much of the economic and political damage to the Sandinistas that encouraged the Nicaraguan electorate to remove them from office.

A final question to ask is whether Honduras may be developing conditions for a national revolt. In the late 1980s, the country was beset by increasing economic difficulties that made an accommodationist policy toward the poor increasingly difficult. Real wages fell in the early 1980s, and the Honduran working class has organized extensively into unions and peasant leagues. The 1988 riots and protests against Honduran cooperation with the anti-Sandinista war revealed another source of intense and unexpected anger. Consumer prices took big jumps in 1988 and 1989 (CEPAL 1989, t. 5). At least certain elements in the armed forces have clearly demonstrated a willingness to employ violent repression, and the commitment to democracy of the civilian leadership is reportedly weak (Rosenberg 1989). This conjuncture suggests that the Honduran government faces ample and growing sources of grievances as well as high potential for popular mobilization and increased repression. Whether Honduran policymakers can redress popular economic grievances from their limited resource base and without resorting to increased political repression may well determine whether Central America will suffer yet another national revolt.

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