

**Elections in Incomplete Democracies:
The Myth and the Reality of Polarization,
and the Puzzle of Voter Turnout
in Nicaragua and El Salvador**

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- I. Incomplete Democracy and the Importance of Levels of Voter Turnout
- II. Citizenship and Centrism in the Consolidation of Democracy
- III. The Myth and the Reality of Polarization in Nicaragua
- IV. The 1996 Nicaraguan Election Campaign
- V. The Puzzle of Comparative Voter Turnout in Nicaragua and El Salvador
- VI. Clarification Via Comparative History
- VII. Conclusion: The Ups and Downs of Incomplete Democracies
- VIII. Appendix - Voter Turnout in Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Elections

Two different versions of this paper are forthcoming, in Spanish translation, in San Salvador, one in the journal Estudios Centroamericanos and one as an occasional paper from the Ungo Foundation. I presented an early version at the Central American University in San Salvador in January 1997, and subsequent versions at conferences in Chicago (Midwest Political Science Association) and Guadalajara (LASA), and at the Stanford University democratization seminar, over the spring of 1997. The development of the paper during that period drew on collaborative work with, and advice and encouragement from, Kenneth M. Coleman. Miguel Cruz has been of great help with regard to my work in El Salvador, and Ricardo Cordova's continuing encouragement has also been important. I would also like to thank Terry Karl and the other organizers and members of the Stanford democratization seminar over the two years that I participated for providing an avenue into the current theoretical debates on democratic transition to someone long out of academia. My analysis of the Nicaraguan election campaign has been influenced by discussions with David Dye, Roberto Zub, Rodolfo Delgado, and, particularly, Manuel Ortega. Of course I alone am responsible for any errors or misjudgments contained herein. Sources include interviews in Managua during March, June, August, and October 1996 and May 1997, and interviews in San Salvador during March and August of 1996, and January, March, and May 1997. My research and writing over the period March 1996 - July 1997 have been supported by a generous grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Abstract

The main body of this paper consists of (1) a discussion of the 1996 Nicaraguan election campaign with emphasis on "the myth and the reality of polarization," and (2) an analysis of "the puzzle of comparative voter turnout in Nicaragua and El Salvador," with a historical addendum on the contrasting fates of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran center-lefts during the 1980s. I place these in the following theoretical context:

North American analysts and policy-makers laud "transitions to democracy" in Nicaragua and El Salvador. But the fullness and consolidation of democracy remain very much up in the air in these societies. This is commonly depicted as a matter of excessive polarization (a form of immaturity) on one hand, and incompleteness on the other hand -- these countries need to add to their party systems and political cultures a strong, organized centrism, and a moderation of left and right, so as to mature beyond polarization. In this mainstream view, democratic consolidation turns primarily on institutionalizing elite pacts, on the strength of centrist parties, and on the spread and institutionalization of "the civic culture" among political elites, activists, and the middle class. If Nicaragua and El Salvador could add to their political systems the modern centrism of the advanced capitalist societies (eclipsing polarization), they would take a decisive step toward completing and consolidating their democracies.

In my view, the foregoing line of argument is mistaken. There is no authentic democracy without mass citizenship. This is not to advocate "participatory democracy" over representative democracy, but rather to emphasize the right of the poor and popular classes to achieve genuine representation (as opposed to enlistment in clientelist networks) and to be treated with equal respect by all state actors. Importation of the kind of "post-modern" centrism that is currently dominant in the advanced societies is not what is called for. It is necessary to recall the role played by a quite different kind of centrism in the earlier history of democratization in most of the now advanced societies -- a center-left positively linked to popular social movements, democratic political mobilization, and a professionalized state apparatus. The Central American countries need to add to their fledgling, incomplete democracies a functional equivalent of that earlier centrism. To jump immediately from their current political systems to regimes dominated by "post-modern" centrism would be not to complete but to short-circuit democratization.

The existing scholarly literature does not give us much help in assessing the importance of the contrast between Nicaraguan and Salvadoran levels of voter turnout. Despite the emphasis on free elections and "participation" in the definition of democracy, levels of voter turnout and abstentionism among democracies are rarely a focus of attention in the democratization literature (and I have seen no discussion, or even recognition, of the contrast between high voter turnout in Nicaragua and low voter turnout in El Salvador). Low voter turnouts have been shrugged off as not really so significant. But the level of turnout in "foundational" elections, as opposed to routine elections in already consolidated democracies, is more significant, it says something more fundamental about the status of democratization, particularly where abstentionism is concentrated among the poor. At stake is the original institutionalization, and the basic credibility, of the principles of mass suffrage and mass citizenship.

The difference in voter turnout is, of course, far from the full story of the relative status of democratization in Nicaragua and El Salvador. But it is a part of the story sufficiently important to be worthy of close investigation; so also is the question of whether political polarization is a basic, on-going characteristic of the entire citizenry, deeply embedded in the national political culture, or only a more limited phenomena, whose degree of predominance, at any particular point, depends largely on election campaign dynamics. If the latter is the case, as I argue, then analysts ought to pay less attention to polarization per se and more attention to the vicissitudes of constructing and institutionalizing mass citizenship.

Elections in Incomplete Democracies: The Myth and the Reality of Polarization, and the Puzzle of Voter Turnout in Nicaragua and El Salvador

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I. Incomplete Democracy and the Importance of Levels of Voter Turnout

Until very recently, the small poor countries of Central America had long been regarded as particularly poor candidates for democratization (despite a good measure of early and sustained success in Costa Rica).¹ Nonetheless, over the years 1984-1996, "transitions to democracy" have been realized throughout the region. Given the extremely negative economic conditions of the 1980s and 90s, and the extent and historical intractability of political violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, these "transitions to democracy" via peace processes and "elections of the century" constitute remarkable achievements.² But the fullness and consolidation of democracy remain very

¹ Roland H. Ebel, "Governing the City-State: Notes on the Politics of the Small Latin American Countries," Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs, 13, no 3 (August 1972); Ebel, "The Development and Decline of the Central American City-State," in Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglia, Howard Wiarda, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1984); Mark Rosenberg, "Political Obstacles to Democracy in Central America," in James Malloy & Mitchell Seligson, eds., Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987). For a somewhat more positive (but still mixed) assessment see Seligson, "Development, Democratization, and Decay: Central America at the Crossroads," in the Malloy & Seligson volume.

² The term "elections of the century" was coined with reference to El Salvador's 1994 elections and has come to be retrospectively applied to Nicaragua 1990, and recently to the November 1995 Guatemalan elections (Stefanie Ricarda Roos, "Democracy and Elections in Guatemala," The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, Vol. 21:1, Winter/Spring 1997, p. 96). In each case, so dubbed because the elections came as the culmination of peace processes ending civil wars, they were the first fully inclusive elections in these countries' histories, they were carried out under tremendous international fanfare, and local, legislative, and presidential elections all occurred at the same time (happens only every 15 years in El Salvador).

For a recent overview, see the articles in Current History, February 1997, Vol. 96, No. 607. See also the reports published by Hemisphere Initiatives cited at various points below, and Jorge Dominguez and Abraham Lowenthal, eds., Constructing Democratic Governance: Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean in the 1990s (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). So far

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much up in the air -- as is in fact the case the world-over among the countries that have experienced some degree of democratic transition during the last two decades -- raising the prospect of an historical era in which the poorer provinces of the globe are populated largely by "hybrid regimes" that are, at best, highly incomplete democracies.³

Interestingly, levels of voter participation have not generally been a focus of commentary or analysis gauging the degree of progress in democratization. At least until very recently, low voter turnouts have been shrugged off as not really so significant.⁴ Instead the topics for discussion have been "crisis of confidence," "crisis of representation," and "crisis of governability" -- based on great volatility in electoral support for parties and politicians, and on opinion poll results showing public confidence in political parties, in politicians, and in government institutions declining sharply in much of the world, especially in the incomplete and struggling democracies of Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union.

As to Central America, much of the current commentary focuses on parallels and symmetries between Nicaragua and El Salvador (with Guatemala recently added in). What were authoritarian

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as I am aware, no other country has ever accomplished a transition to democracy under economic conditions as adverse as those which have existed in Nicaragua since 1987. For discussion of exceptions to the rule that small poor countries are not candidates for democratization see Mitchell A. Seligson, "Costa Rica and Jamaica," in Myron Weiner & Ergun Ozbudun, eds., Competitive Elections in Developing Countries (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987). For updating of Seymour Martin Lipset's classic thesis that economic development is a requisite of democracy, see Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," in Gary Marks & Larry Diamond, eds., Reexamining Democracy (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992).

³ I'm talking about incomplete political democracy, I'm not raising the issue of the extension of democratic principles into the sphere of the economy.

On negative prospects for democratic consolidation in poor countries, see J. Mark Ruhl, "Unlikely Candidates for Democracy: The Role of Structural Context in Democratic Consolidation," Studies in Comparative International Development, Spring 1996, Vol. 31, no. 1. On the nature of hybrid regimes and the likelihood that they will out-number consolidated democracies among poor countries, see Terry Lynn Karl, "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," Journal of Democracy, Vol 6, No 3 (July 1995); Larry Diamond, "Is the Third Wave Over?" Journal of Democracy, Vol 7, No 3 (July 1996). I discuss hybrid regimes further in the next section.

⁴ North American analysts have long been shrugging off the low voter turnout in the United States, and the contrast with high turnout in Europe. Indeed, not so long ago it was not uncommon to argue that low voter turnout was a good thing. Samuel P. Huntington, "The United States," in Michael Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, eds., The Crisis of Democracy (New York: NYU Press, 1975), p. 114; Charles Krauthammer, "In Praise of Low Voter Turnout," Time (May 21, 1990), p. 88. See Tom DeLuca, The Two Faces of Political Apathy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), Introduction.

regimes long racked by civil wars, now have passed through peace processes, pact-making, and foundational elections, adding up to "transitions to democracy." But such commentary typically goes on to stress that both Nicaragua and El Salvador face on-going problems of democratic consolidation because their party systems, their electoral politics, and their political cultures continue to be characterized by left/right polarization, weakness and fragmentation at the center, and inadequate institutionalization of democratic norms. Steady progress toward full and stable democracy is absent -- stalled, blocked, or disrupted. Instead of the transition from authoritarianism to the initiation of democratic forms being followed by a smooth "second transition," we see erratic ups and downs, and continuing democratic deficits.

Thus the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran cases are now often lumped together as relatively successful "transitions to democracy" (via the distinctive peace-process route) that remain highly, and more or less equally, problematic as to democratic consolidation. This is commonly depicted as a matter of excessive polarization (a form of immaturity) on one hand, and incompleteness of democracy on the other hand -- these countries need to add to their party systems and political cultures a strong, organized centrism, and a moderation of left and right, so as to mature beyond left/right polarization. In effect, such is regarded as something of a panacea and a guarantor of democratic consolidation. The advanced capitalist countries are supposedly models of democracies consolidated under hegemonic centrism. If Nicaragua and El Salvador could add to their political systems the modern centrism of such democracies, they would take a decisive step toward completing and consolidating their democracies -- or at least position themselves to begin steady progress, to move beyond the erratic ups and downs of incomplete democracy.⁵ From this kind of perspective, the roles of political right and left are historically limited, primarily a matter of stalemating or discrediting each other, pushing each other into giving up on visions of their own hegemony, giving in to pacts of "transition to democracy," and then giving way to the growth of centrist political parties, the elaboration of centrist civil society, and the spread and institutionalization of a civic political culture.

⁵ Still among the most able applications of this old modernization theory story to Central America is Robert Pastor, Condemned To Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Perhaps the broadest restatement of this line of analysis is Tony Smith, America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994). Samuel Huntington's work is full of intimations of this line of thought, with a center-right spin. See in particular The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For what amounts to a center-left version, which in some ways transcends the genre, see Jeffrey M. Puryear, Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile, 1973-1988 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

From this kind of perspective, once all that is accomplished, we have a consolidated democracy, regardless of the percentage of the population that actually enjoys or exercises citizenship rights, including the vote.

In my view, the foregoing line of argument is mistaken. There is no authentic democracy without mass citizenship, and the kind of post-modern centrism that is currently dominant in countries such as the United States (elements of which are being imported into Central America) does not necessarily help to complete and consolidate democracy, and may in fact make full democratization more difficult. I refer in particular to the U.S. style of electoral politics and emphasis on abandoning the center-left in favor of a "mature," moderate, non-statist (almost neo-liberal) center.⁶ What is often not understood is the role played by a quite different kind of centrism in the earlier history of democratization in countries such as the United States. By this I mean a center-left positively linked to popular social movements, democratic political mobilization, and a professionalized state apparatus.⁷ The Central American countries need to add to their fledgling, incomplete democracies a functional equivalent of that earlier centrism.⁸ To jump immediately from their current political systems to regimes dominated by "mature," almost neo-liberal centrism, and by modern "democracy

⁶ Conveniently epitomized by the Bill Clinton of the last three years, particularly his use of pollster/campaign consultant Dick Morris, whose practice represents the extreme of the "democracy industry."

⁷ In the United States exemplified by the left-wing of the turn-of-the-century Progressive Movement and the left-wing of the New Deal. See, e.g., Alan Dawley, Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); David Plotke, Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

In the United States, the poor and the working class have voted at very low levels throughout almost all of the 20th century (with the exceptions of the 1930s outside the South, and of Blacks in the South during the heyday of the 1960s civil rights movement). In both the 19th and the 20th centuries, the historical episodes in which the lower classes have voted more heavily have been important to the further democratization of the United States. The implications I draw from this (and other) history are directly opposed to the views of those such as Samuel Huntington and Giuseppe Di Palma who argue that democratization can only be successful where the left and center-left leave all radicalism behind, and popular movements demobilize. See Ruth Berins Collier and James Mahoney, "Adding Collective Actors to Collective Outcomes," and Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions," both in Comparative Politics, Vol 29, No 3 (April 1997).

⁸ With regard to the role of government, this is not to advocate a return to statism, but to agree with such arguments as Peter Evans, "The State as Problem and Solution: Predation, Embedded Autonomy, and Structural Change," in S. Haggard and R. Kaufman, eds., The Politics of Economic Adjustment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Atilo Boron, "Democracy or Neoliberalism?" Boston Review, Oct/Nov 1996; Guillermo O'Donnell, "The State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," in William Smith, Carlos Acuna, & Eduardo Gamarra, eds., Latin American Political Economy in the Age of Neoliberal Reform (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

industry" campaign practices, would be not to complete but to short-circuit democratic consolidation.⁹

None of this is to deny the presence of crises of confidence, representation, and governability, or the need for an effective center. But basic levels of participation and citizenship, and national differences in levels of such, seem to me to be essential factors. In many countries voter turnout has waned as the foregoing crises have waxed. But in most countries with free elections, turnout remains above 70% for the most important elections. Europe averaged 80% in the late 1980s. So survey results regarding lack of confidence in political parties and elections in Nicaragua and El Salvador are not unusual.¹⁰ But, in the context of a much congratulated "transition to democracy," the Salvadoran

⁹ By "democracy industry" I refer to the rapidly expanding array of for-profit firms of political consultants, campaign advisors, pollsters, political advertising/publicity agencies and television campaign ad specialists, etc., now operating throughout the world, globalizing the "permanent campaign." For a detailed examination of their involvement, under U.S. government sponsorship, in the 1989-90 election campaign in Nicaragua, see William I. Robinson, A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era (Boulder: Westview, 1992). More generally see Barry Siegel, "Spin Doctors to the World," Los Angeles Times Magazine, November 24, 1991; David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, eds., Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and their Consequences (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1996); Thomas E. Skidmore, ed., Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). There is of course a wide and scathing literature on the development and role of the democracy industry in U.S. politics.

I do not reject the professionalization of election campaigning, campaign polling, etc., per se. In fact, I believe that done in the right way, in conjunction with independent polling and analysis in the media and civil society, they have an important positive role to play in democratization. But the importation of current U.S. practices is often effectively anti-democratic. Phillippe Schmitter takes a more benign view of the importation of "advanced" political practices into new democracies:

"They will be invaded, whether they like it or not, by the most advanced institutions of present-day democracy, without having passed through the processes of gradualism, apprenticeship, and experimentation that were experienced by the older democracies. In other words, these latecomers are going to collect all the flora and fauna--including the most exotic species--of postmodern democracy--and almost all at the same time."

"Transitology: The Science or the Art of Democratization?" in Joseph Tulchin, ed., The Consolidation of Democracy in Latin America (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 20. It seems to me, however, that in the case of much of the democracy industry practice, new democracies are being invaded by the most advanced forms of the corruption and degeneration of democracy without first having built up the countervailing democratic strengths (of civil society and pluralistic professionalism) that limit the damage in the advanced world.

For a very positive description of the role of modern campaign techniques and professionals in one democratization episode, the campaign for the No in Chile, see Puryear, Thinking Politics, op cit. Contrast William I. Robinson, Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 4.

¹⁰ For in depth discussion of the Salvadoran survey results see Kenneth M. Coleman, Jose Miguel Cruz and Peter Moore, "Retos para consolidar la democracia en El Salvador," Estudios

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level of abstentionism (40%-60%) is unusual. Nicaragua had an equally high percentage of the population reporting lack of confidence in political institutions, politicians, and political parties during 1993-1995, and nonetheless, Nicaragua had high turnout for the elections of October 20, 1996 - certainly over 73% of the voting age population.¹¹

This is not to say that higher voter turnout necessarily indicates that Nicaraguan democracy is generally closer to being consolidated. It is true that democratic consolidation remains highly problematic in both El Salvador and Nicaragua (and in fact, in May 1997, Nicaraguan democracy looks in some ways considerably more uncertain than Salvadoran democracy). But there are differences between the two that are as important as the similarities and that may indicate that the two face quite dissimilar obstacles to such consolidation. Certainly the neglected difference in levels of voting is important (I will argue that there are important differences in historical experience and

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Centroamericanos, No. 571-572, Mayo-Junio 1996. On political disenchantment in some other Latin American countries, see, for example, Anibal Romero, "Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Titanic: The Agony of Democracy in Venezuela," Latin American Research Review, Vol 32 No 1 (1997); Catherine M. Conaghan, "A Deficit of Democratic Authenticity: Political Linkage and the Public in Andean Polities," op cit. Recent polling for the LatinoBarometer in a dozen South American countries showed an average of 80% saying they were dissatisfied with the way democracy was working in their country. And of course confidence in public institutions has fallen dramatically in the United States over the last quarter century. For a summary see Erik Asard and W. Lance Bennett, Democracy and the Marketplace of Ideas: Communication and Government in Sweden and the United States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapter 1.

¹¹ Nobody knows with certainty the size of the voting age population (VAP) in either Nicaragua or El Salvador (in particular, estimates of Salvadoran VAP during 1984-1994 vary greatly). The recent census in Nicaragua clearly under-counted VAP in at least some areas. Also, due to serious problems of administration of the immediate post-election process in Nicaragua, we will never know precisely how many people voted in the October 1996 election. The final official count was 1.87 million total ballots (rounded), but this does not include approximately 100,000 ballots from voting places whose reported results were challenged but whose ballots could not be found for recounting. My estimate of the 1996 Nicaraguan in-country VAP is 2.55 million.

In El Salvador, voter turnout is most often calculated as a percentage of registered voters (those whose names have been entered in the electoral registry -- the "padron"). As of March 1997, the padron contained slightly over three million names. However, it is universally acknowledged that this includes at least half a million people who are either dead or living outside the country. What is ignored is that there are approximately an equal number of people who are of voting age and living in the country but whose names have never been entered in the padron. My estimate of the current in-country voting age population is 3.1 million. In my view, it is a serious error to measure turnout as a percentage of those registered (i.e., of the padron), except in countries where the government automatically enters everyone on the voting lists as they come of age (as in all of Europe except France). Were we to determine U.S. voter turnout according to the approach usually employed in El Salvador, we would transform the United States into a high turnout country and erase the contrast with Europe (in the United States, well over 80% of those registered turn out for presidential elections, but only about 60% of VAP is registered).

political culture that underlie the differences in voting turnout). Additionally, these polities differ significantly in the sense in which they are characterized by polarization; in both cases, I disagree with the view that the fundamental reality is profound polarization.

The Salvadoran level of abstentionism cannot be shrugged off as a minor matter.¹² Abstentionism above 35% (much less above 50%) is in fact relatively unusual among countries that hold regular, honest elections. In the Americas, El Salvador shares such high level of abstentionism primarily with the United States and Guatemala, while Nicaragua (with abstentionism of 20%-30%) is more like Costa Rica and Europe. This division applies not only to the overall level of abstention, but also to the locus of abstentionism within the socio-economic structure. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and the United States, abstentionism is highly concentrated among the poor and those with less than completed high school education; this is not the case in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, or Europe, where such

¹² This abstentionism has just become a prime topic of discussion, for the first time. During the weeks before the March 16, 1997 elections, the discourse of the Salvadoran media was very democratic. La Prensa Grafica and El Diario de Hoy were full of editorial and opinion columns on the importance of elections, on the duty of all Salvadorans to act as citizens, on the importance of Salvadorans turning out on election day. Television was full of TSE public service announcements to the same effect. But this campaign was a failure: in fact only about 38% of the voting age population actually went to the urns on election day. In the days after the elections, the media were equally full of worried commentary over the failure of most Salvadorans to vote. Voter abstentionism was suddenly the issue that everyone was writing about and talking about.

Of course, such abstentionism is nothing new in El Salvador. The elections of 1984 were probably the only elections in Salvadoran history in which as much as 60% of the voting age population actually went to the polls. Turnout was probably about 65% of voting age population in 1984. I discount the election of 1982 for the reasons explained in notes 54 and 59 below. Turnout is said to have been heavy in the elections of the 1970s, at least in urban areas, but is impossible to quantify because of the fraudulent nature of the vote counting. In the 1994 "Elections of the Century," when a high turnout was expected, only about 53% of the voting age population cast ballots -- although it is probably true that at least another 5% of VAP tried to vote but was prevented or discouraged from doing so by election-day problems. But in the 1990s, until March 17, 1997, IUDOP has been almost alone in emphasizing the importance of abstentionism. See in particular the article by IUDOP director Jose Miguel Cruz, "Ausentismo en las elecciones: algunas hipotesis y reflexiones desde las encuestas," Estudios Centroamericanos, 545-546, marzo-abril 1994. So far as I am aware, the right in general, and ARENA in particular, have not complained about low turnouts in the past. The left used to talk about the reality and importance of abstentionism, in the years when it advocated boycotting elections, but has not quite known what to say about it in recent years. But see Schafik Handal's discussion with Mauricio Funes, Canal 12, Al Dia interview of March 19.

After the 1994 "elections of the century," despite the modest level of voter turnout, what most commentators discussed was not abstentionism, but polarization between left and right, and the failure of "the center." This was also the topic in Nicaragua in the wake of the 1996 elections there. Relatively little note was taken of the high level of voter turnout in Nicaragua (which was something of a surprise -- turnout might have been expected to decline much more substantially from the high level of 1990, given the great disenchantment with government and political parties among Nicaraguans shown in all the opinion polls from 1993 on). I have seen no discussions focusing on the contrast between the high voter turnout in Nicaragua and the low voter turnout in El Salvador.

abstentionism as exists is spread more evenly through the population.

As I've indicated, the existing scholarly literature does not give us much help in assessing the importance of the contrast between Nicaraguan and Salvadoran levels of voter turnout. Despite the emphasis on free elections and "participation" in the definition of democracy, levels of voter turnout and abstentionism among democracies are rarely a focus of attention in the democratization literature. But the level of turnout in "foundational" elections, as opposed to routine elections in already consolidated democracies, is more significant, it says something more fundamental about the status of democratization, particularly where abstentionism is concentrated among the poor.¹³ At stake is the original institutionalization, and the basic credibility, of the principles of mass suffrage and mass citizenship.

Thus, I disagree with the view that democratic consolidation turns primarily on institutionalizing elite pacts, on the strength of centrist parties, and on the spread and institutionalization of "the civic culture" among political elites, activists, and the middle class.¹⁴ That view does not address the issue of the presence or absence of meaningful popular citizenship, does not recognize authentic mass citizenship as a key constitutive element of political democracy; nor does it recognize the importance of moments of active mass citizenship -- popular activism, middle class radicalization (in a center-left vein), and synergy between the two -- in pushing forward the historical democratization of currently consolidated democracies.

¹³ I disagree with those who dismiss election turnout as an indicator of the status of democratization, as in Kenneth Bollen, "Political Democracy: Conceptual and Measurement Traps," Studies in Comparative International Development, Spring 1990, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 8. Of course it is necessary to know enough about your cases as to be able to make a reliable judgment as to whether the election is reasonably free and most voting neither bought-and-paid-for nor coerced. The Nicaraguan elections of 1984 and 1990 and the Salvadoran elections of 1984 and 1989 have all been attacked, on a variety of grounds, as less than free and meaningful. I agree with some of these criticisms, but regard all of these elections as sufficiently genuine as to render the levels of turnout/abstentionism significant as indicators. (On the other hand, I discount the Salvadoran election of 1982, see notes 54 and 59, below.) The discounting of level of turnout as an indicator, on the basis that high abstentionism might be due to the non-voters' satisfaction with the status quo, is fatuous, at least in the context of poor countries. For a recent strong statement in favor of the significance of turnout see Arend Lijphart's 1996 American Political Science Association presidential address, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," American Political Science Review, Vol 91, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 2-3, 8-9.

¹⁴ See, for example, the preface, and the introductory and concluding essays in John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Barry Weingast, "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," American Political Science Review, Vol 91, No 2, June 1997. Weingast lists El Salvador as having achieved democracy via elections and pacts, and presumably would say the same of Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Voting in elections is of course not all there is to meaningful citizenship. But voting is an essential element of citizenship, and its absence (or complete inauthenticity) invariably says something about the broader political life of those who cannot or do not vote (or cannot vote freely), and has repercussions for the breadth and quality of party competition and public debate. Institutionalization of the suffrage, and of meaningful citizenship, among the poor and "popular sectors" is an essential part of the struggle to construct an inclusive national citizenry, a citizenry with real political rights and responsibilities, not just paper rights and plebiscitary responsibilities. The construction of such a national citizenry is perhaps the most fundamental element of democratic consolidation.

The extent to which the lower classes vote is significant. The difference in this regard between Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the similarities between Nicaragua and Costa Rica on one hand, and between El Salvador and Guatemala on the other hand, are significant.¹⁵ This difference in voter turnout is, of course, far from the full story of the relative status of democratization in Nicaragua and El Salvador. But it is a part of the story sufficiently important to be worthy of close investigation; so also is the question of whether political polarization is a basic, on-going characteristic of the entire citizenry, deeply embedded in the national political culture, or only a more limited phenomena, whose degree of predominance, at any particular point, depends largely on election campaign dynamics. If the latter is the case, as I argue later in this paper, then analysts ought to pay less attention to polarization per se and more attention to the vicissitudes of constructing and institutionalizing mass citizenship.

II. Citizenship and Centrism in the Consolidation of Democracy

Mass citizenship, rather than Schumpeterian electoralism, the "procedural minimum," or an expanded procedural minimum, ought to be at the center of our conception of political democracy. In stressing mass citizenship, I am not advocating "participatory democracy" over representative democracy. Rather, I mean to combine some of the themes of the literature on deliberative democracy with an emphasis on the right of the poor and popular classes to achieve genuine representation (as opposed to enlistment in clientelist networks) and to be treated with equal respect -- as citizens -- by

¹⁵ It is rare to see Nicaragua paired with Costa Rica and contrasted with El Salvador and Guatemala. One analysis that does so is Einar Berntzen, "Democratic consolidation in Central America: a qualitative comparative approach," Third World Quarterly, Vol 14 No. 3 (1993).

all state actors. This is a challenge to procedural conceptions of democracy.¹⁶

There has been a lot of writing on citizenship in recent years (particularly in the literature on human rights-oriented social movements), but citizenship generally has been treated in a cursory or formalistic manner in the theoretical literature on transition to democracy -- despite the fact that O'Donnell and Schmitter, in their seminal work, write:

"Democracy's guiding principle is that of *citizenship*. This involves both the *right* to be treated by fellow human beings as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the *obligation* of those implementing such choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity. Inversely, this principle imposes *obligations* on the ruled, that is, to respect the legitimacy of choices made by deliberation among equals, and *rights* on rulers, that is to act with authority (and to apply coercion when necessary) to promote the effectiveness of such choices, and to protect the polity from threats to its persistence."¹⁷

In a widely cited 1990 article, Terry Karl defines democracy as "a set of institutions that permits the entire adult population to act as citizens" and shortly thereafter she and Phillippe Schmitter wrote that "*Citizens* are the most distinctive element in democracies" (emphasis in original).¹⁸ But these first principles do not really animate the rest of the analysis, and a serious concern for broad democratic citizenship has not characterized most of the theoretical literature on democratization. In particular,

¹⁶ It is rarely noted that Robert Dahl, from whose work most conceptions of the "procedural minimum" derive, in fact makes something close to universal equal citizenship central to democracy. Indeed, much of his conceptualization of political democracy is not just ambitious, but quite utopian. See, for example, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 2; Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 6; Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), part three. Remarkably, many analysts, in adopting a procedural-minimum type definition of democracy, conflate the views of Schumpeter and Dahl, when in fact the two are completely at odds on the issue of universal citizenship. See Dahl's Democracy and Its Critics, pp. 121-2. For Schumpeter, it is completely immaterial to "democracy" whether the poor, the working class, racial minorities, women, etc., are denied citizenship rights. Joseph A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975), pp. 243-45. After reading those pages of Schumpeter, it becomes particularly telling that for Samuel Huntington the debate about how to conceptualize democracy "is now over. Schumpeter has won. His concept of democracy is the established and the Establishment concept of democracy." "The Modest Meaning of Democracy," in Robert Pastor, ed., Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum (New York: Holmes & Meier), p. 15; also The Third Wave, op cit., p. 6 (there is no discussion, and so far as I have found no mention, of citizenship in this book).

¹⁷ Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 7-8, emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," Comparative Politics, 23, Oct 1990, reprinted in Rod Camp, ed., Democracy in Latin America: Patterns and Cycles (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), p. 23; Schmitter and Karl, "What Democracy Is...and Is Not," in Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, eds., The Global Resurgence of Democracy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 41. In the first piece, Karl appears to be quoting Robert Dahl, though the manner of citation is confusing.

it is rare for such literature to address the issue of how important and difficult and unusual it is to make citizenship real in the lives of the poor majority.

Karl's recent work on "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," is in the vein of O'Donnell's and Schmitter's earlier "democradura" concept, but represents a major advance beyond that formulation, as does the recent work of O'Donnell and a few others. This work does treat as fundamental the issue of the common failure of putatively democratic regimes to make citizenship -- democratic legal and political rights -- real in the lives of the poor.¹⁹ Thus conceptualized, these hybrids are not simply "facade democracies," but they retain many authoritarian aspects, and their defining characteristic is sharp unevenness of "democraticness" across territory, across social structure, and across functional spheres. I would like to conceptualize this regime characteristic in terms of what sociologists of law call the "gap problem" ("the gap between the law in the books and the law in action"). In "facade democracies" the discrepancy between avowed principles (of constitutions and formal political culture) and the substance (if not the superficial formalities) of actual political and governmental practice is virtually complete. In "hybrid" regimes the gap is less egregious for some social groups, for some elements of civil society, for the employees of some institutions, for the inhabitants of some geographical areas, and with regard to some functions of government (for example, in major urban areas, government officials and police may respect the rights not only of the wealthy but also of the middle class, most NGOs may operate without serious harassment, and elections may be largely free and clean, whereas the situation for economically and geographically

¹⁹ In addition to Karl's "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," op cit., see Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico," World Politics, 46 (January 1994), 151-84; Catherine Conaghan, "A Deficit of Democratic Authenticity: Political Linkage and the Public in Andean Politics," Studies in Comparative International Development, Fall 1996, Vol 31 No 3; and a series of articles by Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," Journal of Democracy, Vol 5, No 1 (January 1994), "The State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," op cit., and "Transitions, Continuities, and Paradoxes," in Scott Mainwaring, O'Donnell, & Samuel Valenzuela, eds., Issues in Democratic Consolidation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 42-45. O'Donnell writes:

"Here lies the essence of the social conditions necessary for the exercise of citizenship: how can the weaker and the poorer be empowered in terms consistent with democratic legality and, thus, gain their full democratic and liberal citizenship? Even a political definition of democracy...must pose the question of the extent to which citizenship is really exercised in a given country." (emphasis in original)

"The State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," pp 166-67.

marginal populations and communities may be very different).²⁰ By contrast, relatively complete and consolidated democracies are characterized by the relatively comprehensive narrowing of the gap problem with regard to the principles of universal equal citizenship.

The foregoing perspective leads me to adopt a definition of democratic consolidation that differs substantially from definitions that focus on whether all significant political actors have ceased to question that honest elections are "the only game in town," the only route to governmental power.

Definition of democratic consolidation: The essence of fully consolidated democracy is that the norm of universal equal citizenship is effectively institutionalized and informs the rule of law. That means (1) equal legal/human rights in the face of the army, security services, police, courts, public bureaucracies, (2) equal voting rights (both equal opportunity to vote and each vote counts equally in determining who will occupy top government offices), and (3) equal rights to political speech, political assembly, political organization.

Implicit in the institutionalization of universal equal citizenship is that partisan opponents recognize and accept each other as citizens and as joint authors of the political process. This means, most importantly, that the upper classes (and the military) accept mass citizenship and independent political organization -- not just in rhetoric, but in actual practice. It also means that left and right accept each other as citizens -- and recognize their own followers as citizens, rather than seeing them only as disciplined foot soldiers. Universal equal citizenship is incompatible with sectarianism and vanguardism, left and right. Democratic leadership, by definition, seeks to encourage and work with authentic mass citizenship. Also implicit in the institutionalization of universal equal rights to political expression is the principle of an open public sphere.²¹

No society has accomplished the effective institutionalization of universal equal citizenship across its whole territory, across its whole social structure, across the full range of bureaucracies and laws, across all time periods since the institutionalization of formal democracy. All societies are hybrids whose degree of democraticness waxes and wanes historically to some extent (much more attention ought to be paid, for example, to the historical waxing and waning of North/South

²⁰ See in particular Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism..." op cit., and O'Donnell, "The State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," op cit.

²¹ Eventually I want to lay out a Gramscian version of this paragraph. There is a very insightful theory of democratization contained within Gramsci's analyses of what makes for more successful and less successful bourgeois regimes in Europe (not the contrast between "revolutions east and west," but the contrast between France and Italy). You have to weed out the elements of Marxist teleology, class reductionism, and Leninist vanguardism, but with Gramsci that's not really so difficult since his intelligence constantly escaped that framework.

differences in the United States). But there are real and consequential differences between different levels of democraticness and different degrees of democratic consolidation.²²

Where has movement toward democratic consolidation come from? The contemporary "transition-to-democracy" literature often argues that such transition has been the outcome of compromise and pacting among actors that all have had other agendas (i.e., none of them are actually champions of democracy). Be that as it may, I would argue that historically, full political democracy, in particular the extension of suffrage and citizenship to the lower classes, has been a project of the center-left and has not progressed very far absent at least episodic political success by the center-left.²³

²² Howard Wiarda has long argued that somewhat authoritarian hybrid regimes are natural and appropriate to Latin America and that demands for thorough-going democratization are unrealistic and dangerous. He makes this argument not on structuralist grounds, but on culturalist grounds. His views have always been close to those of the Latin American center-right. He and they have gradually come to accept at least limited forms of liberal democracy as appropriate for Latin America -- compare the various gradations of such acceptance evidenced in the many anthologies in which Wiarda has recycled his views over the last 20 years. See, e.g., Corporatism and National Development in Latin America (Boulder: Westview, 1981), The Democratic Revolution in Latin America (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), Democracy and its Discontents (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Samuel Huntington has long argued that all attempts at thorough-going transcendence of the gap problem are counter-productive and dangerous. See, in particular, American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

The Left also used to reject the viability of democratization, and the possibility of any substantial transcendence of the gap problem, in Latin America -- absent a revolutionary break with the status quo. Hybrids with democratic formalities and pretensions were only facade democracies, with no positive evolutionary potential. Views on the left are now much more complex, and most have accepted at least the potential, if not the current, meaningfulness of non-revolutionary politics within hybrid regimes. Compare Jorge G. Castañeda, Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), Jeffrey M. Puryear, Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile, 1973-1988 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), James Petras and Fernando Ignacio Leiva, Democracy and Poverty in Chile: The Limits to Electoral Politics (Boulder: Westview, 1994), William I. Robinson, Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

I realize that to call what I've offered a definition of democratic consolidation is problematic, and I can't say I've worked out what I think it means to talk about consolidation, as opposed to movement from a minimally democratic hybrid to a somewhat more fully democratic hybrid, or from there to even greater fulfillment. I would say that (1) there should be a necessary connection between progressively full development of the achievement said to be key and the imparting of firmness, resilience, durability to the democratic system; and (2) at the same time, the key achievement ought to be one whose relatively full development necessarily implies that the system really deserves to be called a democracy (without adjectives). Institutionalization throughout elite political culture of the norms of a procedural minimum may fulfill the first condition, but doesn't fulfill the second condition, unless the procedural minimum is so expanded as to be coextensive with the institutionalization of universal equal citizenship.

²³ Surges of mass participation and resurgence of democratic civil society are prominent in the transition-from-authoritarianism literature. But these are depicted as one-time eruptions, to be followed by demobilization. This picture contrasts sharply with the importance of repeated historical episodes

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Definition of centrism: Centrism has always meant reforming capitalism to render it more humane, more inclusive, less unequal, more politically democratic - via strategies of expansion of the suffrage, class compromise, and class collaboration. Center-left has meant being serious about this, pushing reformism and enfranchisement of the lower classes, paying attention to the higher ideals of democratic liberalism and to "the gap problem" -- the "gap between the law in the books and the law in action," and more broadly, the gap between avowed ideals, principles and norms on one hand, and actual institutional practice on the other. Center-right has meant that reformism should go slow, being careful not to infringe the legitimate rights of private capital and careful to nip "communist" impulses and "disorder" in the bud.

Centrism also implies an emphasis on negotiation and compromise among whatever "legitimate" political forces exist, and the idea that public bureaucracies and the legal system should be politically neutral as between such "legitimate" forces (the center-left tends to argue that the realm of legitimate political forces extends to include popular movements and the non-sectarian left, against more restrictive conceptions of the center-right). The idea of professionalization of public bureaucracies and the courts, and the idea of an honest, non-partisan public service providing public goods equally to all without discrimination, also enter in here. The center, center-left, and center-right all champion these ideals of professionalization and oppose the efforts of right and left to make the public bureaucracies and courts partisan. Related to this is the advocacy of an open and autonomous public sphere, animated by civil society, as opposed to a hortatory public sphere promoted and regulated by the state as part of a partisan "war of position."

In most times and places, the center has tended to be center-left in rhetoric and center-right in practice, leaning one way or the other depending on the strength of right and left (nationally and internationally). Generally, only a strong center-left (combined with a relatively weak right), or a powerful center-left/left alliance (on center-left terms) results in putting centrist principles into practice in a systematic and sustained way, and comprehensive narrowing of the gap problem regarding the principles of universal equal citizenship -- as is necessary for full democratic consolidation.²⁴

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of center-left popular mobilization in the democratization of the United States and most other now relatively consolidated democracies. See note 28, below, and the sources cited in note 7 above.

²⁴ As historical sociologists, beginning with Barrington Moore, have emphasized, a precondition for the effective emergence of such center-left project is a historic defeat or decline of the socio-political power of traditional landed elites. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). The case is made for Central America in definitive fashion in Jeffrey Paige's Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America (Cambridge: Harvard

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My approach here differs from much mainstream political science because the latter has commonly worked with a conception of centrism that emerged at a point in time when recognition of the connection between democratization and a center-left committed to popular mobilization had been submerged by Cold War themes and by the results of the early voting behavior studies (which seemed to show mass political culture to be anti-democratic). That center-right conception of centrism was challenged from the mid 1960s into the 1970s, both in politics and within the social sciences, but the excessive radicalization of that challenge and the massive counter-attack by the right (in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars invested in think tanks, endowed university chairs, media, civil society, and electoral politics) brought a center-right version of the old modernization theory story back to the fore, now dressed up in new neo-liberal clothes.

The modernization and political development theory of the 1960s also saw democratization as the product of the rise to hegemony of centrist political cultures and political party systems, decisively marginalizing both right and left. The difference is that while the recent pacting literature sees the "transition to democracy" as largely contingent upon the strategic thinking and conduct of elite political actors, the literature of the 1950s and 1960s saw the "transition from tradition to modernity" (with "modernity" seen as subsuming procedural democracy) as a "natural history" whose essence was the ineluctable rise to hegemony of an inherently centrist modern middle class. By the second half of the 1960s, it was recognized that at many times and places the history that had been "natural" in the West remained stalled or became problematic -- despite the diffusion of the "modern world culture" and demonstration effects from the West -- and consequently right and left continued

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University Press, 1997). Paige is pessimistic about the prospects for fulfillment of the center-left project in the wake of the establishment of liberal democratic forms. A similar and even more pessimistic line of analysis is taken in Elizabeth Dore and John Weeks, "Up From Feudalism," NACLA Report on the Americas, Vol XXVI No 3 (December 1992). My own view is closer to that taken in Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, Capitalist Development & Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), i.e., that the prospects for further democratization are more of an open question. See also Karl, "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," op cit.

Robert Putnam's vision of democracy as dependent upon "overlapping networks of social solidarity, peopled by citizens with an unusually well developed public spirit" and who "find equality congenial" -- "social and political networks [that] are organized horizontally, not hierarchically" -- is very much a center-left vision. Making Democracy Work (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 115. To the best of my knowledge, Putnam has not acknowledged that, though he does highlight the contrast between this democratic political culture and the traditional, authoritarian conservatism of southern Italy. See Sidney Tarrow's review essay on Making Democracy Work in the American Political Science Review, Vol 90, No. 2 (June 1996).

to dominate the political spectrum. Where this was the case, emergency measures were called for in order to bring something like centrist hegemony into being.²⁵ Rhetoric of the search for a "third force" or "third way," between right and left, pervaded the Alliance for Progress, the reaction to the Cuban revolution, discussions of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and the Carter administration's analyses of Central America.²⁶ In this view, it shouldn't matter whether the past includes temporary victories by the right (at least short of full scale fascism), since such were bound to give way to centrism over time, but any continuing strength by the radical left was regarded as quite negative for democracy and any substantial victory disastrous.²⁷ Still the assumption was that the normal course was for the left also to eventually fade into moderation or marginality.

But through the 1960s and 1970s and into the 1980s both right and left continued to play much more important roles in Latin American politics, and in most places the political center failed to become a leading player, much less hegemonic. This was especially true in Central America, outside Costa Rica. Frustrated U.S. policy-makers prior to the 1980s and, in particular, the Reagan administration during the 1980s, saw this left\right polarization as unnatural and sought to teach Central Americans their standard (after 1965, ever more center-right) versions of political democracy and centrism. But these versions were either delusional or dishonest. They did not reflect the reality of historical democratization in the United States, in which repeated episodes of strong center-left popular mobilization had been key, and they certainly could not work in Central America.²⁸ Still, the

²⁵ The argument of this paragraph is from my Ph.D. dissertation, Development Theory and Ideology: The Triumph of the Modern Middle Class in Theory and Practice, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, 1979. On the failure of natural developmentalism to realize itself in the Third World and the need for emergency measures, the seminal work was Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

²⁶ See Robert Pastor, Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua, op cit. More generally see Robert Packenham, Liberal America and the Third World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

²⁷ On this point, Jeane Kirkpatrick was only the most explicit, adamant, and politically influential. See the characterizations in the comparative politics literature of the 1950s and 60s of the significance of the presence of strong lefts in post-WWII France and Italy, in particular the threat represented by the PCI in Italy. Also compare evaluations of the Allende regime and the Pinochet regime in Chile by the Nixon administration and conservative scholars. For Kirkpatrick's apotheosis see Dictatorships and Double Standards (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

²⁸ As Laurence Whitehead has written, the U.S. government confronted the Central American situation "by extending its classification of the 'centre' to cover almost all the real forces on the right and by extending its classification of the 'extreme left' to embrace many of the forces and interests

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Salvadoran right opposed even this skewed teaching as virtually pro-communist (while the Salvadoran Christian Democratic party, under the leadership of Napoleón Duarte, and much of the Nicaraguan right, more or less accepted such tutoring). In Central America, only the center-left had any real understanding of what political democracy and effective centrism actually consisted in and required under Central American conditions. When the center-left tried to raise that flag, it suffered heavy repression and was driven to the left (whereupon it was condemned as communist by the United

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without whose participation there could never be an authentic democratic centre." "The Prospects for a Political Settlement," in Giuseppe DiPalma and Whitehead, eds., The Central American Impasse (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 231.

What U.S. policy-makers were incapable of understanding was that authentic and durable democratization is highly unlikely absent the sustained (or repeated) presence and political success of forces at least as radical as the Civil War era Radical Republicans, the Knights of Labor and Farmers Alliances of the 1880s, the turn-of-the-century Debsian socialists and suffragettes, the CIO of the 1930s, and the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States. It is such forces that have always been the driving forces of democratization. It was the refusal of the Central American right and the United States government, after the late 1940s, to accept growing power for such reformist/democratizing forces that made some kind of revolutionary struggle necessary and inevitable.

Samuel Huntington has written that U.S. intervention in Central America during the 1920s and 30s was similar to the federal government's intervention in the U.S. South in the 1960s in support of black voting rights and honest elections, implying that the difference is that in Central America, due to indigenous backwardness, democracy ended as soon as the Marines withdrew, whereas in the U.S. South, democracy quickly consolidated. American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 250-51. Huntington completely misses the crucial difference: in Central America the United States government always worked with (at least some wing of) the local oligarchy and against any middle class radicalization or assertion from below, whereas in the U.S. South of both 1865-1876 and the 1960s, middle class radicals and popular movements won tolerance and a degree of support from the federal government and Northern civil society. Central American elections under the auspices of the U.S. Marines did not constitute democracy. In the South of the 1890s, with federal support for Black voting rights withdrawn, Black political assertiveness was crushed by the Klan and Jim Crow state governments. Black voting fell from over 50% in 1876 to zero by 1900. Between the 1880s and the 1960s, there was no democracy in the U.S. South.

The classic, and under-appreciated, mainstream attempt to deal with the issue of how U.S. liberal intellectuals have mistakenly believed that a 1950s style "vital center" could be the vehicle for democratization in the Third World is Robert Packenham, Liberal America and the Third World, op cit. For an extensive explication and critique of Packenham, see Barnes, Development Theory and Ideology, op cit.

On the self-deceptive character of U.S. thinking and policy toward Central America see, in addition to the Whitehead piece cited above, Thomas Carothers, In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Benjamin C. Schwarz, American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building (Santa Monica: RAND, 1991); William Barnes review essay on Roy Gutman, Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua 1981-1987, published in part in Central America Bulletin, Oct 1989; William M. LeoGrande, et al, "Grappling with Central America: From Carter to Reagan," in Morris Blachman, et al, eds., Confronting Revolution (New York: Pantheon, 1986); More generally, see, Michael Shafer, Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Tony Smith's America's Mission, op cit., both in some ways transcends and in some ways reasserts the old self-deception. In that sense, it parallels Packenham's earlier work.

States). Extreme polarization was the result of this repression and exclusion of the center-left.²⁹ But the course of repression and the fate of the center-left turned out differently in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and that difference had profound repercussions for the emergence of mass citizenship and voting (I return to this point in section V below).

Contemporary commentary on Central America often does not pay more than lip service to the historical origins of current polarization. The emphasis rather is on the brute fact of polarization, its puzzling persistence despite the "end of history" and the universal valorization of liberal democracy, and on the need for polarization to be superseded by the hegemony of a moderate center. Those who view political polarization as incompatible with democratic consolidation see national politics as unworkable in the absence of a strong center party or centrist party system. Left and right are seen as by nature focused on ideological attacks on each other, inflammatory, unwilling or unable to negotiate and compromise effectively, and this necessarily leads to on-going political confrontation and governmental gridlock, immobilism, and ineffectiveness. It is also thought that only a dominant center is likely to institutionalize democratic procedures and norms, establishing professionalism, commitment to pragmatic bargaining, and a civic culture among elites and activists -- from where they can spread into the attentive public and then, to some degree, into the general population.

But the problem with polarization should not be seen as the presence of left and right, and weakness at the center, per se. The problem rather is the manner in which the poles typically face and engage each other in political systems in which deliberative norms and an open public sphere have not been effectively institutionalized.

²⁹ Some analysts have suggested that if, in place of such repression, power-holders had made even modestly serious efforts to accommodate the reformist and democratic demands of the center and center-left of the 1970s, the development of revolutionary civil wars might well have been avoided. Kenneth M. Coleman, "The Consequences of Excluding Reformists from Power," in Coleman and George Herring, eds., Understanding the Central American Crisis (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1991); John Booth, "Socioeconomic and Political Roots of National Revolts in Central America," Latin American Research Review, 26, 1 (1991), p. 61; Mitchell Seligson, "Agrarian Inequality and the Theory of Peasant Rebellion," LARR, 31, 2 (1996), pp. 151-55; Jeff Goodwin, "Why Insurgencies Persist, or the Perversity of Indiscriminate Repression by Weak States," in his State and Revolution, 1945-1991 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Douglas Kincaid, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador," originally Comparative Studies in Society and History, 29, reprinted in Daniel Levine, ed., Constructing Culture and Power in Latin America (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 140, 143. See also Jeffery Paige's comparison of the acceptance of reformism by Costa Rican coffee elites and its rejection by Salvadoran coffee elites. Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America, op cit.

III. The Myth and the Reality of Polarization in Nicaragua

In the aftermath of the October 20, 1996 elections, Nicaragua has been depicted as totally polarized:

"Con motivo de la polarización electoral hay quienes sostienen que Nicaragua es como un camello. En otras sociedades, dicen, hay una extrema izquierda y una extrema derecha pequeñas. El centro político es una joroba grande. Aquí es al revés. Hay una enorme izquierda y una enorme derecha y en el centro no hay nada. Es como un camello." Tendencias, 56, November 1996, p. 20.

This is misleading; it does not represent realism; it is not the way Nicaraguans should see themselves and their recent history. While the strong reassertion of polarization in the last two or three months before the Nicaraguan election, and the complete electoral failure of the center and center-left parties, are real and significant, as is enduring conflict over the legacy of the Sandinista revolution (particularly regarding property issues), polarization is not the essential truth of Nicaraguan politics.³⁰

In fact there is no evidence that the majority of Nicaraguans are characterized by strong political identifications, much less by ideological "extremism". Rather, there are two strong political camps or poles, each with a base amounting to perhaps 20-25% of the electorate. Neither polar camp is able to organize a majority, and the 50% or more "between" the poles (what I have called the "mixed middle") has so far been incapable of self-organization. During the election season, parts of this unorganized "middle" become oriented toward each of the poles as the poles attempt to attract their votes by "moving toward the center" or by trying to instill fear of the opposite pole. But this does not produce any lasting integration or incorporation of such "middle" elements with the poles - except in so far as the winner is able to use government resources to bring about a clientelist incorporation, and that kind of incorporation lacks any substantive political or ideological content. After the election (or after the new administration's honeymoon), most of these "centrist" elements slough off their

³⁰ My disagreement with the view of Nicaragua as fundamentally polarized between left and right is based on my earlier study of the extensive public opinion polling conducted during the year preceding the February 1990 elections. In my view, that polling established the existence of a large "mixed middle" in Nicaragua, meaning 50% or so of the population that never fully identified with either right or left, but had mixed and ambivalent feelings about both. See my "Rereading the Nicaraguan Pre-Election Polls in the Light of the Election Results," in Vanessa Castro and Gary Prevost, eds., The 1990 Elections in Nicaragua and their Aftermath (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992); and "Reading Nicaraguan Political Culture Through the Lens of the 1989-1990 Pre-Election Polling Controversy," published in Spanish in Cultura Política y Transición Democrática en Nicaragua, Ricardo Córdova & Gunther Maihold, eds. (Managua: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1996).

I think this idea of a large "mixed middle" also applies to El Salvador.

association with the poles, and the latter more or less return to 20-25%.³¹ Thus while polarization (and the inability of the center parties to attract support) applies to vote intention and voting behavior, it is not really the correct conceptualization of the underlying reality of political culture and public opinion. It is correct that the center is not effectively organized. But the weakness of the center and the polarization of the election season certainly do not mean that the population in general is highly ideological or highly partisan. Socio-economic polarization, in the form of increasing inequality, has been very real. But such polarization is different from, and does not necessarily translate into, polarization in public opinion or partisan identification, much less in political culture.

Thus Nicaragua, in fact, continues to be characterized by the existence of a large "mixed middle" -- but is also characterized by the pronounced tendency of this "middle" to respond to election campaigns by dividing, with most people choosing to align, temporarily, with one or the other of the two poles of the political spectrum. The Salvadoran "mixed middle," by contrast, does not respond to election campaigns this way, but rather remains on the sidelines -- that is, the Salvadoran "mixed middle" is made up largely of historical abstainers who are relatively unaffected by election campaigns, who do not become oriented toward either political pole (or toward any political actor), even at the height of election season.

The common idea that fear is the trigger of polarization, that a tendency to focus on political "extremes" and to fear "the greater evil" is a basic characteristic of Nicaraguan political culture which readily comes to the fore in election season, is also misleading. Examination of poll results demonstrates that many FSLN voters and many Alianza Liberal voters are not highly antagonistic toward "the other side," but rather have mixed feelings. And in pre-election surveys about 90% typically agreed that they would fully accept the election result no matter who won. Lesser majorities agreed that the winner should govern via construction of a national accord or set of alliances. In many cases that I witnessed, FSLN fiscales and Alianza Liberal fiscales seemed to get along well in the course of their local-level pre-election and election-day duties.³²

³¹ In El Salvador the situation is similar except that the "mixed middle" is made up of historical abstainers who still do not become oriented toward either pole during election season.

³² In June 1996 visits to registration places in and around Matiguas (an area of relatively strong anti-Sandinista sentiment), several such election workers told me that bitter inter-party antagonism was more a characteristic of party leaders, or of "Managua." It is my impression that what commonly happens is that when elements of party leadership emphasize and encourage such antagonism in their rhetoric at rallies and in the media, mid-level party activists act it out on the ground. This dynamic can work

(continued...)

Despite all the talk (and the not inconsiderable reality) of Nicaragua's long history of violent factional conflict, extreme antagonism and fear toward one pole or the other are not simply natural to this political culture, rather they are promoted by the discourse and activities of particular politicians and media at particular points in the election campaign. An extreme polarizing dynamic may or may not take off, depending on background conditions, on the continuing interplay of campaign tactics by the politicians, and on the nature and effectiveness of responses by the media and civil society.

Where the background conditions are a persistent state of social disorder, decay, and insecurity, the population is more vulnerable to negative campaigns encouraging demonization and scape-goating of opponents. Such has been the case in Nicaragua ever since 1987, and especially after 1992. Despite some important accomplishments, the Chamorro administration was characterized by a complete failure to bring recovery in economic production and employment (resulting in increasing mass impoverishment), by a series of corruption scandals, and by years of incessant bickering and gridlock within the National Assembly and between the National Assembly and the executive branch.³³ Much of the population seems to have moved toward the view that almost any form of effective leadership and coherent policy-making would be better than going on like this. Another important background condition has been the intensification of globalization (I discuss this briefly in the latter part of section V below). Both kinds of background conditions tend to create in the population both a felt need for a strong political actor, and a vulnerability to being swept up by negative campaigns.

I want to go into some detail regarding the Nicaraguan election campaign in order to make

(...continued)

in reverse as well. The extent and intensity of fear and antagonism are, at least in part, products of the course of political struggle, including the course of election campaigns.

I am not saying that there is no polarization among "ordinary" Nicaraguans. Obviously there are significant numbers of people on the right and on the left who despise their polar opposites - and in a small country, it doesn't take that many to make political extremism and violence significant realities. Additionally, even if people who disagree with each other about the legitimacy of the property redistributions of the former revolutionary government don't actually hate each other, that cleavage is of continuing political salience. Significant numbers of people are readily mobilizable on the basis of that cleavage when property issues are being addressed by government or within an electoral contest. Manuel Ortega has persuaded me on this point.

³³ By March 1995, 78 of the 92 members of the Assembly had been expelled from or otherwise left the political parties on whose tickets they were originally elected in 1990. Rose Spalding, "Nicaragua: Politics, Poverty, and Polarization," in Jorge Domínguez & Abraham Lowenthal, eds., Constructing Democratic Governance: Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean in the 1990s (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 8.

clear how extreme polarization is largely a conjunctural phenomenon rather than being the fundamental political reality.

IV. The 1996 Nicaraguan Election Campaign

In a sense there were two different election campaigns going on in Nicaragua during 1996:

Campaign 1: the campaign between Daniel Ortega/FSLN and Arnoldo Aleman/Alianza Liberal. The campaign of each of these competitors was divided between (a) a more European-style component, associated with the party apparatus, which emphasized base-rallying, highly partisan campaigning door-to-door, in the streets, on the radio, and with local rallies; and (b) a more U.S.-style component, associated with the presidential candidate, which emphasized a more moderate, soft and open image, building alliances, and trying to reach out beyond the party base to the center and the indecisos, all approached largely through television and major campaign events designed with media coverage and the television audience in mind.

Until August, Aleman and the Alianza Liberal emphasized component (a), while beginning with the July 19 anniversary celebration,³⁴ and accelerating through August, Ortega and the FSLN emphasized component (b). Beginning in the second half of August, the Alianza Liberal campaign increasingly combined component (a) with a U.S. style negative media campaign, attempting to sharpen and generalize polarization through demonization of the opponent. In September, the FSLN campaign (a) began to respond in kind, though not on television, which remained the province of Ortega's campaign (b).

Campaign 2: the campaign to define the "center" and to overcome polarization. This campaign also had two separate parts: (a) the campaigns of the center and center-left political parties to establish a centrist electoral option, and (b) a public interest campaign emphasizing the need for a national accord on governability and agreement on a national minimum agenda, led by civil society and strongly supported by the UNDP and some international donors, with participation by some elements of the Chamorro administration. The electoral training, voter education, and turnout-promotion efforts of the Consejo Supremo Electoral (CSE) should also be seen as part of this campaign.

Both parts of Campaign 2 were efforts to put forward a "center," or set of centrist agreements, around which different forces could compromise and reconcile and the country could rally. Implicit in Campaign 2 was the view that the Chamorro administration had been an attempt at such a centrist regime, and while that attempt was not well carried out on some dimensions, and in fact was really successful only on a few dimensions, that spirit should be institutionalized.

³⁴ Marking the anniversary of the 1979 fall of Managua to the revolutionary forces.

Campaign 2 actually started much earlier than Campaign 1 (except that local Alianza Liberal organizing campaigns had been going on ever since the Atlantic Coast elections of 1994). In fact, Campaign 2(a), the effort of various centrist parties and would-be presidential candidates to establish themselves in the public mind as real options, began well before the 1996 electoral season. Until sometime in the first quarter of 1996, the political panorama did not look so strongly polarized, and the center looked wide-open, with Daniel Ortega polling only 15-20%, and Arnoldo Aleman (mostly) 25-35%. This picture did not change decisively until sometime after May. The view of Nicaragua as fundamentally politically polarized is largely based on the fact that during the last two months before the election the polls showed the indecisos increasingly choosing either Ortega or Aleman, and then during the last three weeks, the escalating interaction between the negative campaigns of the Alianza Liberal and the FSLN took center stage, completely marginalizing Campaign 2. The question is: Was this inevitable? Did it simply disclose the underlying bedrock reality? Is it lasting? As I have already indicated, I believe that the answer to all of these questions is no.

Initially, for much of the FSLN leadership (which at least prior to August 1996 doubted that Ortega could win the presidency), rallying the party base, regrouping party sympathizers, and demonstrating continuing party strength and unity were the first goals of the election campaign (so as to decisively counter the arguments of both the AL and the MRS that the FSLN belonged to the past). Beyond that, establishing a more effective, more Sandinista-influenced version of the centrist regime (hitherto poorly incarnated by the Chamorro administration) was the goal -- possibly by nominating the widely respected former president of the Consejo Supremo Electoral, Mariano Fiallos, on a coalition slate, or by managing to get a centrist politician (Antonio Lacayo or Alvaro Robelo) into a runoff against Aleman (Ortega stepping aside at the last minute), or by tying Aleman down with pre-election (or post-first-round) agreements amounting to a transition protocol in exchange for foregoing a second round runoff, and combining that with an opposition majority in the National Assembly and a centrist mayor of Managua. But the possibility of a Fiallos candidacy fell through by early 1996, then the center parties proved incapable of any coalescence, then Lacayo and Robelo were disqualified from candidacy. Meanwhile the FSLN had some success bringing off alliances with sectors previously opposed to it and Ortega experienced a sustained rise in the polls from May to September while Aleman seemed to stagnate. Possible routes to the maintenance of a centrist regime disappeared, while the FSLN leadership came to believe it had a chance to win.

The FSLN campaign was split between an Ortega campaign and an FSLN party campaign, with the former emphasizing moderation and alliance-building (hence somewhat aligned with Campaign 2), and the latter more polarizing and, especially at the end, both negative and triumphalist.³⁵ The style, image, and discourse of FSLN presidential candidate Daniel Ortega were designed both to rally former Sandinistas back to the party and to appeal to voters beyond the FSLN base, as was the thematic content emphasizing reconciliation with past opponents, transcendence of militarism (almost to the point of pacifism), national unity, and defense of the poor (in the mode of left-wing populism). This added up to something quite different from the central tendency of the FSLN's 1989-90 campaign (which emphasized nationalism and the linking of UNO to Somocismo, the Contra, and U.S. interventionism).

This innovative FSLN campaign appears to have met with substantial success. Polling during the first five months of 1996, when the FSLN had not yet begun its "pre-campaign campaign," suggested that Arnaldo Aleman was on his way to a relatively easy victory, and that Daniel Ortega might well not reach 30% of the vote unless turnout was quite low (in which case the FSLN base would loom larger within the smaller universe of actual voters). However, the poll numbers then began to change and by a month before election day, it appeared that Ortega had gained about 15 points (gradually moving from the low 20s to the mid 30s by September) while Aleman had stagnated (just over or just under 40%), and the third parties were collapsing. The average projection from the last round of polls, done during the first week of October, was Aleman 46, Ortega 41, others 13.

³⁵ There was also such a split in the FSLN campaign in 1990, but it was not nearly as pronounced, as Daniel Ortega's 1990 image and style were not as consistently distinct from that of the party apparatus, not as thoroughly moderate and pro-reconciliation. There was something analogous to this kind of split in Salvador in 1994 between Ruben Zamora's campaign and much of the FMLN campaign. In both Nicaragua and El Salvador, the major left political parties have tried to figure out how to craft and carry out a hybrid campaign drawing on both the European model of party-centered, base-mobilizing campaigning with an emphasis on large outdoor rallies and door-to-door canvassing, and the U.S. model of candidate-centered media campaigning with an emphasis on targeting segments of swing voters through customized messages. At least at times, different factions within the parties have emphasized one or the other of these models, and there has been some struggle over which should predominate, connected to the struggle between social democratic/left-populist tendencies and vanguardist tendencies. The 1997 FMLN election campaign made substantial progress toward transcending such problems and producing a more coherent campaign.

My own view is that the construction of such a hybrid mode of electoral politics is indeed necessary, but that it must be based on thorough-going critiques of both U.S. style "democracy industry" campaigning and vanguardist versions of party-centered politics. It is my impression that many on the Central American left regard the Brazilian Workers' Party as something of a model in this regard.

Looking at those results, it seemed clear that if Ortega's momentum had continued after September, then the race had become too close to call. Getting that close seemed a remarkable achievement on the part of the Ortega campaign. To me, this was a surprising result, especially as to the extent of Ortega's rise, but also as to the collapse of the center-left parties (Sergio Ramirez's MRS in particular) and the reappearance (as in 1989-90) of extreme polarization in the electoral scenario.³⁶

However, by the time the foregoing picture became clear (at least to me) about a week before election day, that picture was very likely out of date and Ortega's momentum in reverse. Such late reversal of momentum, not fraud, probably explains most of Aleman's wider margin of victory on October 20. In the last two weeks of the campaign, the FSLN party apparatus, particularly in Managua, including the party newspaper *Barricada*, became aggressive, strident and triumphalist, and the FSLN pulled off a remarkable final campaign rally in Managua (well over 200,000 and at least three or four times the size of Aleman's closing rally), all reminiscent of 1990 (and the rally more impressive than in 1990 as this time it was done without government resources). Two days before the election, one of Ortega's top strategists told me with complete assurance, "Managua is Sandinista now." Everyone agreed that Ortega could not win without winning Managua with a substantial advantage over Aleman; the last round of polls all had Managua too close to call. But in fact Aleman won both the city of Managua and the department by about five points.³⁷

In discussions immediately after the election, I presented the view that the triumphalism of the FSLN's Managua party apparatus and media, and the final campaign rally (which the FSLN paid to have broadcast live over all of the television stations), had done much more to rally anti-Sandinismo (converting waverers, potential abstainers, third-party sympathizers into Aleman votes) than to rally swing voters to Sandinismo, particularly in Managua. On one hand, this was a shocking counter-

³⁶ I was skeptical regarding the poll results showing a steady decline in the undecideds after April. I thought such results were probably a methodological artifact, and that in reality a larger proportion of voters remained less than firmly decided. See my "Como medir a los Indecisos?" *Confidencial*, Ano 1, No. 4, Del 28 de julio al 3 de agosto de 1996. Clearly I was wrong. The fact that many of the large number of voters who were undecided in the first quarter of 1996, and who told pollsters they lacked confidence in all political parties, moved toward a voting decision even before the campaign heated up in August, and then actually turned out on election day, makes a very interesting contrast with the conduct of the undecideds in El Salvador.

³⁷ Ortega received fewer votes in the department of Managua than the number of people who attended the final FSLN rally; Aleman got at least three times as many votes in the department as attended his final rally.

intuitive idea to some FSLN leaders with whom I spoke, while, on the other hand, it elicited immediate agreement from people outside the FSLN (indeed, it seemed obvious to them).³⁸ The inability of the FSLN leadership to foresee this possibility is telling, an example of how much of the left continues to be blinded by its ability to mobilize and rally its own base in public, and continues to not quite recognize when it has ended up preaching to the converted.

The foregoing should not detract from the accomplishments of the Ortega campaign during the months of August and September, or the major successes of the FSLN in the western part of the country, particularly Leon and Chinendega. Ortega led Aleman and the FSLN won many local governments and parliamentary deputies throughout the western departments, improving substantially over 1990. In Leon and Chinendega, Ortega led Aleman by about 47% to 41% and the FSLN led the AL by about 46% to 36%.³⁹ Overall, the recriminations of the leaders of the FSLN Managua apparatus against the designers and managers of Ortega's moderate, alliance-oriented campaign are, in my view, off-base. Indeed, the possibility raised by this campaign of alliance between left and center, on center-left terms rather than on the terms of the 1980s, is of great importance -- despite the difficult problems for such alliance raised by the extreme personal bitterness between leaders of the FSLN and leaders

³⁸ By May 1997, the Sandinista leader who had told me the day after the final rally, "Managua is Sandinista now," had come to recognize the foregoing. It should be noted that the Managua results were a surprise to everyone in that a large measure of split-ticket voting had been expected but failed to materialize. The Alianza Liberal mayoral candidate, Roberto Cedeno, had always been in third or fourth place in all polls, including Aleman's own campaign polls. On the night before the election, Aleman's pollster, Victor Borge, told me that Cedeno "is nothing" and that the victory of popular subscription candidate Pedro Solorzano was assured. But Cedeno won with just under 30% (with Solorzano and the controversial FSLN candidate Guadamuz both in the mid to high 20s). In March 1997, Borge told me that he still did not understand how Cedeno could have won.

³⁹ In the other western departments (Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Esteli), Ortega and the FSLN won by four to six points (averaging 43.7% of the valid vote), whereas over the rest of the country, Aleman and AL victory margins were from 10 to 40 points everywhere except Managua (4%) and Carazo (1%). As compared to the Leon and Chinendega results, in the rest of the country, Aleman averaged about 10 points higher and Ortega about 12 points lower, and the AL on average led the FSLN by about 48% to 35%. In 1990, Ortega won Region I (Esteli, Madriz, Nueva Segovia) by less than one point, with 48% of the valid vote, and lost Region II (Leon and Chinendega) by almost nine points, with 43.5% of the valid vote. Thus the FSLN 1996 improvement in Leon and Chinendega stands out strikingly. This may or may not have anything to do with the quality of the Ortega/FSLN campaign. The city of Leon (with over 40% of the departmental vote) has always been a strong point for the FSLN (though it is also the historical center of Nicaraguan Liberalism), and the FSLN city government elected in 1990 had been popular. The FSLN actually lost the city of Chinendega (representing about 30% of the departmental vote), and large FSLN margins in the rest of the department probably represent the return to the party of agricultural workers and campesinos (beneficiaries of Sandinista agrarian reform) who had voted for Chamorro in 1990 but then fared particularly poorly under the Chamorro administration (this last point was made to me by Ivan Garcia and by Jorge Samper).

of the MRS. But none of this is to say that there are no criticisms to be made of the very image-conscious, often not very substantive, Ortega campaign.⁴⁰

Another factor weighed heavily in Aleman's widening lead of the last days before the election: a strong anti-Sandinista offensive by the leadership of private business (COSEP) and, in particular, the Catholic Church. It is the interaction among these factors and the end-of-campaign FSLN triumphalism that should be the focus of analysis of the election, not fraud. But let me address the question of fraud for a moment, so as to substantiate my claim that it should not be the center of attention.

Much of the news coverage and commentary on the Nicaraguan election, particularly from the left, emphasized the FSLN claim that Arnaldo Aleman's Liberal Alliance committed massive fraud and stole the election. This view was pushed in particular by the leaders of the FSLN Managua party apparatus.⁴¹ But the claim of large-scale, decisive fraud is unpersuasive, as shown by the following:

The FSLN's own secret quick count on election night confirmed Aleman's victory with something over 45% of the vote -- based on FSLN fiscales reporting of their own observation of the original ballot count in their JRVs. This quick count, designed, organized and carried out by former Sandinista government officials and overseen by a member of the FSLN Direccion National, was based on a stratified sample of 400 JRVs. By about 10:00 p.m. on election night it was clear that Aleman had won. The quick count numbers stabilized between 10:15 and 10:45 and did not change significantly after that. At 5:00 a.m. the quick count operation closed down and reported the results to the Direccion National. Those results were: Aleman 47.3%, Ortega 42.1%, others 10.6%. All other quick counts of which I am aware had Aleman one to two points higher and Ortega one to two points lower. All quick counts were based not on actas or telegrams, but on direct observation and

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Aleman's campaign pollster, Victor Borge (in the past, campaign pollster for Oscar Arias and Violeta Chamorro), believes that Ortega's soft campaign was "beautiful but ineffective," and that Ortega would have been better served by a stronger, more pointed, defense-of-the-poor campaign -- that such would have made it a very close contest, and possibly even given the victory to Ortega. On the other hand, one of Aleman's other top foreign campaign consultants, Felipe Noguera (in the past, campaign pollster for Alfredo Cristiani and Armando Calderon Sol in El Salvador and for Alvaro Arzu in Guatemala) believes that the Ortega soft campaign was quite effective, that it was in fact a major accomplishment to have successfully regrouped Sandinista sympathizers, and that a different type of campaign would not have done better. (I interviewed Borge in March and Noguera in April.)

⁴¹ While, in contrast, Mariano Fiallos, and the entire MRS, called for acceptance of the election result and of the government-elect.

immediate report of the actual ballot counts in a scientifically designed sample of JRVs, before any filling out of actas.⁴²

The quick count results conform very closely with the results projected by the last round of polls in early October. These polls were in close agreement with each other and showed an average projection of Aleman 46%, Ortega 41%, others 13%. I believe these results were probably quite accurate for early October, that Ortega peaked at that time, and that Aleman widened his lead in the last week because of the concerted anti-Sandinista offensive by COSEP and the Catholic Church and because the FSLN's final rally and last minute triumphalism rallied anti-Sandinista sentiment even more effectively than it rallied pro-Sandinista sentiment. There is no doubt at all that absent any fraud, Aleman would still have come in first, and very little doubt that he would still have been over 45% (necessary to avoid a runoff).

None of this is to deny the existence of serious irregularities, disorganization, and some fraud. It will never be possible to determine how much fraud there was and how much difference it made in the vote numbers. But it is almost certainly true that the disorganization was much more important

⁴² The results of the most elaborate quick count, that of election observation group Etica y Transparencia, were: AA 49.22, DOS 40.87, otros 10. The FSLN quick count was probably less accurate because, according to my information, its sample of JRVs was drawn well before the number and location of JRVs was finalized, at a point when only 6000 JRVs, as opposed to the final 9000, had been designated. My guess is that 49 to 41 is closer to the true, honest results than is the 51 to 38 spread ultimately settled on by the CSE.

To the best of my knowledge the FSLN quick count has remained secret (my information on that count comes from an October 26, 1996 interview with a person who took part in its design and execution). This is completely unrelated to the FSLN parallel count which Daniel Ortega used as the basis for his complaints the day after the election that there was something wrong with the results that the CSE was announcing. In a parallel count, you simply aggregate whatever results you are able to obtain by reports from people observing initial ballot counts. Reports come in haphazardly, simply on the basis of whichever JRVs get their counts done first and have easiest access to communications. There is no representative sample of the universe of all JRVs. A parallel count is entirely unreliable until you have results from a quite large proportion of that universe.

I observed the actual ballot count at 12 JRVs in three different Managua neighborhoods, including one neighborhood historically strong for the FSLN. Ortega won only two of those twelve JRVs, and in most cases, Aleman was a little over 50%. At each JRV, FSLN representatives told me that after the initial logistical problems of the morning, there had been no further problems. I observed no disagreements or disputes among mesa staff or fiscales in the course of ballot counts.

So far as I am aware, the credible claims of fraud all refer to fraudulent telegrams and actas, and to the disappearance of ballots, or the appearance of fraudulent ballots, after the initial ballot count in the JRVs. None of this should affect quick count results since those results are based on immediate report of the initial ballot counts in the JRVs by people present and observing those counts. An independent investigation by the weekly political newsletter Confidencial determined that of the Managua JRVs whose urnas could not be found after election day, 28.4% were headed by a Sandinista president and only 35.7% were headed by a Alianza Liberal president (23.3% headed by presidents from other parties, and 8.4% not identified). See Confidencial issue #19.

than the actual fraud. This disorganization was largely a product of the National Assembly's late imposition on the CSE of electoral law changes forcing the CSE to absorb into its structure at the departmental leadership level inexperienced and unprepared political partisans nominated by the political parties. That is the root of the havoc wreaked in Matagalpa by the wretched Alianza Liberal departmental president. The failure to provide the CSE with adequate funding and governmental support, and the scheduling of the election during the month of worst weather, when logistical operations in much of the countryside are a nightmare, also contributed. The CSE as a whole was far from perfect, and even its veteran leadership and staff fell well short of their 1984 and 1990 performances, but it is doubtful that anyone could have done much better under the highly unfavorable circumstances.⁴³ In my view, defense of the autonomy of the CSE, and of the tenure of its veteran leadership and staff, is essential to the defense of democratization. So also is a reasoned attack on the electoral law, and responsible analysis and critique of the mode of operation of the CSE as a whole during the entire electoral process.

The FSLN post-election campaign to completely discredit the election was not constructive, and not helpful in bringing the FSLN base to greater political realism. The same judgment applies to the post-election campaign of Aleman, the Alianza Liberal, and the anti-Sandinista media to pretend that absolutely nothing untoward had happened, and that Sandinista complaints were simply sour grapes. (Indeed, some level of outrage over irregularities and improper or fraudulent practices is preferable to the more resigned and cynical attitude common in El Salvador after the 1994 election.) Aleman's popular support, and the substantial continuing popular antagonism toward the FSLN are realities that Sandinistas must acknowledge, just as the substantial continuing popular support for the FSLN is a reality that Aleman, the AL, and the other anti-Sandinista protagonists must accept. The

⁴³ The attacks on CSE president Rosa Marina Zelaya are grossly excessive and unfair, and at times rise to the level of outrageous slander. A Sandinista virtually all of her adult life (in recent times with the MRS), she is honorable, dedicated, and extremely hard-working. She certainly made missteps in the course of the very difficult electoral process, but nobody worked harder or contributed more to the struggle to make that process work. That she in any way favored the Alianza Liberal is nonsense (as many of the people voicing such accusations well know). Strong criticism that may be somewhat justified is that Zelaya didn't delegate enough, instead tried to do too much herself, and was unrealistically optimistic that somehow it would all work out. After quoting some such criticism, the magazine *envio* responded that such comments have all come from men who may find it difficult to accept a woman taking firm charge of public duties, and pointed out that "Those who criticize her so strongly seem to forget in doing so that these problems were bequeathed to her by a man [Mariano Fiallos] who resigned the position she dared to step into precisely because he knew they could not be brought under control." *envio*, December-January, p. ____.

fact that neither of these two poles of the political spectrum is actually majoritarian is a reality that each must accept. The public discourse of each side needs to acknowledge reality. The post-electoral continuation of Campaign 1(a) obstructs both the appropriate and necessary reasoned critique of the electoral process and the reemergence of Campaign 2(b). As I suggested above, the emphasis on the issue of fraud also deflects scholarly analysis away from its proper focus, the character and dynamics of the campaign. I now return to that focus.

Campaign 1 did not begin to heat up until August, in part because the FSLN was lying low, its strategists believing that their 1989-90 campaign had lasted too long and peaked too soon. Much of private capital, traditional civil society, and the Catholic hierarchy was also holding back. As has historically been the case in Nicaragua, big capital was splintered (and there was no U.S. pressure toward unity as there had been in 1989-90), some supporting Conservative party candidate Noel Vidaurre, some supporting Chamorro's former de facto prime minister, Antonio Lacayo, some supporting Aleman, and many remaining on the sidelines, dissatisfied with all the options (there was an unsuccessful effort to draft the prominent Conservative personality Pablo Antonio Cuadra). There was a sense of waiting to see if any of the center candidates could catch on and begin to move in the polls.

But in August, as Campaign 1 got hot, Ortega's poll numbers continued to improve while Aleman still didn't move. Perhaps in response, the Alianza Liberal campaign went strongly negative beginning in late August. Many analysts thought that that was a mistake and was backfiring, that people were reacting against it, with the result that Ortega, who stayed on-message with his moderation/reconciliation themes, continued to close the gap in the polls. But in the last three weeks before the October 20, election, the FSLN party campaign also went increasingly negative and became increasingly triumphalist, particularly in its presentation of the huge final FSLN rally in Managua five days before the election. At the same time, private business, including major media, came off the sidelines and onto the field with a vengeance, as did the Catholic hierarchy, all coalescing with the AL's negative campaign. Cardinal Obando y Bravo's actions were particularly important.

After the close of the campaign, when all election propaganda was banned, Cardinal Obando invited presidential candidate Arnoldo Aleman and the Alianza Liberal candidate for Mayor of Managua, Roberto Cedeno, to participate in a mass with him and to be photographed doing so. The mass was transmitted over live television. Aleman was given the opportunity to read a psalm referring to those "chosen by Christ." Cedeno read the responding psalm. The photographs of this were held

back for three days, then published on the front pages of the anti-Sandinista newspapers on election morning. The papers were hawked to those standing in line at polling places. At this same mass, Obando preached the "parable of the viper," a story in which two campesinos come upon a large snake half dead with cold in the middle of the road (Alianza Liberal campaign propaganda had referred to the FSLN as a poisonous snake). One campesino proposes saving the snake, but the other warns that if they save it, it will bite them and kill them. The first campesino says, no, that won't happen, "circumstances have changed" (a phrase used frequently in the FSLN campaign in the course of explaining that an FSLN government would never again be militaristic or implement a military draft or find itself at war with the United States). The campesino picks up the snake, warms it up under his shirt, whereupon it bites him and he dies. Obando concluded by calling upon Nicaraguans to vote with prudence.⁴⁴ Finally, on election morning, Obando's voting was covered by live television, and as he was beginning to fold his presidential ballot in preparation for depositing it in the ballot box, the open ballot fell to the ground face-up, clearly marked for Aleman, as the television camera focused in.

In summary, reaction against the Alianza Liberal negative campaign caused some people to rally to the FSLN, after which elements of the FSLN became triumphalist. That in turn produced a counter-reaction -- FSLN triumphalism ended up rallying anti-Sandinismo even more effectively than it rallied Sandinismo. The polarization dynamic accelerated. In the end, the polarizing confrontation of Campaign 1 overshadowed and overwhelmed Campaign 2. It was the powerful peaking of Campaign 1 in the last week, the interaction of the last-minute triumphalism of the FSLN with the last-minute concerted anti-Sandinista offensive by private business and Cardinal Obando, that made

⁴⁴ As a columnist for *Nuevo Diario* wrote, the election campaign had been like a baseball game in which the Liberals scored a lot of runs in the early innings to take what seemed like an insurmountable lead. But then the Liberals ceased to score while the Sandinistas began scoring a few runs in each inning. In the bottom of the ninth, the Sandinistas remained only two runs down and loaded the bases. With two outs, Daniel Ortega came to the plate. The liberals then brought in their veteran relief pitcher, Obando y Bravo, who proceeded to strike out Ortega with his famous Snakeball. (I have embroidered on the *Nuevo Diario* version.)

Cardinal Obando and the Catholic hierarchy had pulled a similar trick in 1990. On the morning of election Sunday, they organized an ingenious tweaking of Daniel Ortega. The election was on the 25th of February, and Daniel Ortega appeared in the fifth box on the presidential ballot. Accordingly, one of the FSLN slogans was (mark your ballot in) "the fifth on the 25th." On election morning, Catholic clergy around the country read to their parishes from the Book of Daniel, chapter five, verse 25, wherein it is written (approximately) "Your kingdom is temporary and will be washed away." Augustin Jarquin, one of the top UNO campaign leaders, told me this story in a February 1995 interview.

polarization, and the fear of the greater evil, not just predominant but overwhelming.

As I argued earlier, extreme antagonism and fear toward one pole or the other are not simply natural to this political culture, rather they are promoted by the discourse and activities of particular politicians and media at particular points in the election campaign. An extreme polarizing dynamic may or may not take off, depending on background conditions, on the continuing interplay of campaign tactics by the politicians, and on the nature and effectiveness of responses by the media and civil society.

Under the background conditions that existed in Nicaragua in 1996 (years of persistent social disorder, insecurity, impoverishment, subjection to outside forces, persistent inability of government to act effectively to control such factors), the public interest campaign, Campaign 2(b), had a hard time getting the serious attention of a cynical population with little confidence in politicians or political institutions. But that campaign was prominent, and had a chance to be effective, as long as private business remained splintered and largely on the sidelines of Campaign 1, and Cardinal Obando remained supportive of Campaign 2(b) and otherwise in the background, also not joining in Campaign 1.

Thus while polarization (and the inability of the center parties to attract support) applies to vote intention and voting behavior, it is not really the correct conceptualization of the underlying reality of political culture and public opinion. It is correct that the center is not effectively organized. But the weakness of the center and the polarization of the election season certainly does not mean that the population in general is highly ideological or highly partisan.

Thus in Nicaragua full political polarization is more conjunctural than structural. The weakness and disorganization of the center are more fundamental. I believe that this conclusion also applies to El Salvador. Nicaragua and El Salvador are similar in the following ways: (1) wide acceptance over the electorate of democratic principles and forms in the abstract, combined with wide cynicism and lack of confidence toward virtually all existing political forces and institutions; (2) continued weakness of centrist political parties, the virtual absence of an organized political "center"; (3) left/right polarization of the electoral scenario (with soft or ambivalent supporters of the polar parties expressing more positive attitudes toward them during electoral season than they do outside electoral season); (4) but regardless of electoral outcomes, none of the existing polar contenders has shown prospects of achieving true majoritarian status; a majority of each electorate (and pluralities of those who actually vote) continues to display mixed, ambivalent views toward both poles (giving,

in a sense, a "centrist" appearance), but remains politically unorganized.

However, the history of the center is actually very different in the two countries. Despite the inability of the Nicaraguan center to establish durable political organizations or political unity, the Nicaraguan center-left has had a strong impact on Nicaraguan political culture and civil society. Until relatively recently, the center-left has had less opportunity and less impact in El Salvador, to the detriment of democratization. I will discuss this point further below, after addressing the issue of comparative voter turnout.

V. The Puzzle of Comparative Voter Turnout in Nicaragua and El Salvador

Nicaragua and El Salvador share many similarities - demographic, socio-economic, cultural, historical, and in the institutional outlines of government (strong presidential systems with unicameral legislatures and election by proportional representation). Moreover, their "transitions to democracy" have corresponded in time. During the same period in history, the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, both countries experienced strong revolutionary movements against "reactionary despotism," civil wars, the initiation of honest elections, and internationally-supported-and-mediated peace processes ending the civil wars, followed by "elections of the century" (Nicaragua 1990, El Salvador 1994). But the two countries have been dramatically different in their levels of voter turnout -- in those "elections of the century," Nicaragua approximately 78% and El Salvador approximately 53%. (See voter turnout table attached as appendix.)

As mentioned earlier, the Salvadoran level of abstentionism is relatively unusual among countries that hold regular, honest elections. In the Americas, El Salvador shares such high level of abstentionism primarily with the United States and Guatemala, while Nicaragua is more like Costa Rica and Europe.⁴⁵ This division applies not only to the overall level of abstention, but also to the

⁴⁵ Among Latin American countries holding regular honest elections in the 1990s, turnout has averaged about 75%; among the established European democracies (excluding Switzerland but adding Japan, New Zealand, Australia), turnout has averaged about 78% in the 1990s, down a few points from the average of the 1980s. But almost all of these countries, unlike Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the United States, have either government initiated voter registration or compulsory voting, sometimes both. On the importance of compulsory voting for turnout see Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (March 1997), pp. 8-9. Switzerland has always had the lowest turnout for national elections in the democratic world (most recently 46%) primarily because it has more frequent elections (at various levels) than any other country and national elections are not particularly important under its system of government. The Swiss, like Americans, are said to suffer from "election fatigue." Robert Jackman

(continued...)

locus of abstentionism within the socio-economic structure. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and the United States, abstention is highly concentrated among the poor and those with less than completed high school education; this is not the case in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, or Europe, where such abstentionism as exists is spread more evenly through the population (though there is still some differential between the least educated and most educated segments of the electorate).⁴⁶

But if we look more closely, apply standard political science analysis, consider a wider range of (less fully democratic) cases, and take into account the recent declines in voter turnout almost everywhere, we must conclude not only that Salvadoran turnout is relatively low, but also that

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& Ross Miller, "Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies During the 1980s," Comparative Political Studies, Vol 27, No 4 (1995); Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi, Pippa Norris, eds., Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), pp 16-19; G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," American Political Science Review, Vol 80, 1 (March 1986).

⁴⁶ Regarding degrees of socio-economic concentration of abstentionism in different countries, see Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation," op cit. At page 3 of that article, he argues that abstentionism would be much higher among the lower classes, and hence much more unevenly distributed across class structure, were compulsory voting to be abolished.

My general conclusions about comparative voter turnout in Central America differ substantially from some of the general conclusions reached by Mitchell Seligson, et al, in their path-breaking "Who Votes in Central America? A Comparative Analysis," in Seligson and John Booth, eds., Elections and Democracy in Central America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). This is primarily because the sharp contrast between Nicaraguan turnout and Salvadoran turnout does not show up in that article for two reasons. First, the article's ultimate conclusions compare Central American averages to the rest of the world. Second, the article addresses turnout among urban electorates only. This obscures the disparity between Nicaragua and El Salvador because rural turnout is much lower than urban turnout in El Salvador, while there is no substantial difference in Nicaragua (except regarding the Atlantic Coast -- also this contrast between the two countries probably did not obtain in the 1984 elections, when El Salvador had its highest turnout and Nicaragua its lowest; the rural vote being more effectively mobilized than usual in Salvador and being depressed by the U.S.-promoted election boycott in Nicaragua). Moreover, the overall conclusions of the article effectively ignore some of its own data and argument. For example, the graph on page 169 shows Salvadorans below the age of 25 voting at much lower levels than their Nicaraguan counterparts; and the discussion at pp. 165-66 agrees with my classification of Nicaragua with Europe and El Salvador with the United States.

My general conclusions also differ somewhat from those of Enrique Baloyra's "Elections, Civil War, and Transition in El Salvador, 1982-1994: A Preliminary Evaluation," in the above-referenced Seligson & Booth volume. Baloyra's explanation of Salvadoran turnout places more emphasis on conjunctural factors -- events and conditions surrounding particular Salvadoran elections -- and emphasizes that turnout was relatively high in 1982 and 1984. He is certainly correct that the relatively high turnout of 1984, and the continuing decline of the Christian Democratic vote after that point, deserve more attention than I have been able to give them here.

Nicaraguan turnout is unusually high for the kind of electoral system and the kind of electorate it has.⁴⁷ What is most striking of all is the difference in turnout between El Salvador and Nicaragua. The two electoral systems and the two electorates are similar in many ways, and where they differ, the differences (with one exception) should favor higher turnout in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan electorate is somewhat poorer, less educated, and markedly younger than the Salvadoran electorate, all factors which should depress voter turnout in Nicaragua according to the literature on voting behavior in democracies. Salvador is more advanced in many ways, with more sophisticated civil society and governmental institutions, a stronger economy and a larger and more highly educated middle class. It would seem that of the two, Salvador ought to be farther along the road to democratization, including, or especially, with regard to voting. Yet the Nicaraguan electorate consistently votes at much higher rates than the Salvadoran electorate. This is an interesting puzzle.

There are two simple and straightforward dimensions of democracies that the political science literature has shown to powerfully impact voter turnout: the ease or difficulty of voter registration (and the interaction of that factor with the educational profile of the electorate), and the age profile of the electorate.⁴⁸ Much of the difference in turnout between the United States and Europe is explained by the fact that most states in the United States have made it burdensome for the poor and less educated to register, whereas the European governments maintain the registration lists themselves, requiring no initiative from voters. Turnout among registered voters in the United States (87% in 1980) is comparable to Europe, but essentially the entire voting age population (VAP) is registered in Europe, whereas only a little over 60% of VAP is registered in the United States. Registration and voting are

⁴⁷ U.S. turnout averaged 62% in the 1960s and 53% in the 1990s. Twenty one mostly European democracies averaged 82% in the 1960s and 76% in the 1990s. Russell Dalton, Citizen Politics, 2nd ed. (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996), p. 45. Note that in Nicaragua, voting has never been legally obligatory, as it once was in El Salvador, and as it continues to be in almost every other country of Latin America, including Costa Rica. This is often only a nominal obligation (with punishment for non-compliance the equivalent of a parking ticket and only laxly enforced), but nonetheless, where the political culture is characterized by a sense of citizen duty to vote, or by a sense of worry about official disapproval of abstentionism, such legal obligation probably provides substantial reinforcement at the margin. Some analysts would go much further in attributing effectiveness to the legal obligation. See Arend Lijphart's 1996 American Political Science Association presidential address, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," American Political Science Review, Vol 91, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 2-3, 8-9.

⁴⁸ Russell J. Dalton, Citizen Politics, 2nd ed. (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996), pp. 44-46, 58. Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America (New York: MacMillan, 1993), pp. 137-39, 206-08. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote (New York: Pantheon, 1988). Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," op cit., pp. 17-43.

highly correlated with education in the United States, whereas such correlation is weak or absent in most of Europe. As to the age factor, in most democracies, turnout increases with age and is substantially lower among those under the age of 25. This is thought to be a product of younger people having less experience with and involvement in social and political associations which would expose them, and render them responsive, to electoral appeals and mobilization efforts from political parties and organizations.⁴⁹

The problem is that both of these standard political science explanations for variance in voter turnout heighten our puzzle rather than helping to resolve it, i.e., they both suggest that turnout should be very low in Nicaragua and somewhat higher in El Salvador.

Nicaragua has just the kind of voter registration system that should be most likely to seriously depress registration and hence voter turnout: registration is entirely voter-initiated and relatively complex, must be renewed for each election, the closing date is long before election day, everything must be done in person (nothing by mail), and registration and voting are not mandatory.⁵⁰ According to the academic literature on voting behavior in democracies, such systems should particularly depress registration in relatively young, less educated, and poorer electorates (where large portions of the electorate would be unfamiliar with the registration process, find it difficult to understand, and costly

⁴⁹ See Rosenstone & Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America, pp. 137-141. There seems to be agreement that this is the central factor, but, at least with regard to the United States, Rosenstone & Hansen are hasty in dismissing the interaction between life-cycle effects and historical-period effects. See Warren Miller & J. Merrill Shanks, The New American Voter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 41, 94; Dalton, Citizen Politics, p. 212.

⁵⁰ For the ways in which such factors depress turnout, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America (New York: MacMillan, 1993). There was no permanent or on-going registration in Nicaragua during the period 1984-1996 (a system based on a voting document good for ten years, similar to El Salvador's system, began to be implemented in 1996). For each election, voters were required to travel to a registration office on one of a group of weekends three or four months in advance of election day and apply for a voting document. They would then have to return at least once to pick up the completed document. That registration closed so far in advance of election day -- and of the peak of campaigning -- is particularly important. Rosenstone and Hansen, comparing the impact of different state registration laws on voter turnout in the United States, conclude: "...the provision that stands out consistently as having the greatest impact on registration and turnout is the closing date..." "Early closing dates, by requiring people to register long before campaigns have reached their climax and mobilization efforts have entered high gear, depress voter participation... [P] Early closing dates have their greatest impact on the people who are least likely to vote anyway" (207-08). The Nicaraguan achievement of over 90% registration with a closing date so far in advance of election day is extraordinary. It seems likely that registration would have been significantly higher (than the 91% achieved) in 1990 had registration remained open into the last, very heated, months of the campaign.

to negotiate), and in countries with poor transportation systems. That is exactly the kind of electorate, and the kind of transportation situation, that exist in Nicaragua, among the poorest countries of the Western Hemisphere, with a voting age of 16 (lower than every other country in the Western Hemisphere except Brazil). Nicaragua has large remote mountain and jungle areas where the only transportation is by foot, horseback, or canoe, and even outside those areas, the transportation system is bad almost everywhere, making travel back and forth to registration and voting places burdensome for the poor.⁵¹ Yet Nicaragua has achieved registration rates in excess of 90% for each of its presidential elections (1984, 1990, 1996). Turnout on election day was approximately 69% of VAP in 1984 (despite a U.S.-promoted boycott by the right-wing opposition), 78% in 1990, and something over 73% in 1996.⁵² As far as I have been able to determine, Nicaragua has the highest voter registration rate (and, at least in 1990, one of the highest voter turnout rates) in the world for an electoral system with this combination of characteristics.⁵³

⁵¹ Mitchell Seligson has shown that in Costa Rica, the most well-established democracy in Latin America, voter abstentionism is highly correlated with residence in poor rural districts. He suggests that this is a product of the expense of bus transportation to and from registration and voting places. Mitchell Seligson, "Costa Rica and Jamaica," in Myron Weiner & Ergun Ozbudun, eds., Competitive Elections in Developing Countries (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 172-73.

In Nicaragua, as in Costa Rica, places of registration and voting are numerous and widely dispersed wherever population is concentrated, making for easy access. This is the one structural advantage that the Nicaraguan system has over the Salvadoran system, which has many fewer and much less dispersed registration and voting places. Nonetheless, in rural areas of low population density, many Nicaraguans must travel significant distances to registration and voting places entailing some costs (in money or time), and in remote areas such travel is difficult and very time-consuming.

⁵² See note 11, above. In the Institute of Nicaraguan Studies' April 1997 survey, which excluded the Atlantic Coast and Rio San Juan, 83.6 percent of respondents reported having voted in the October 1996 election. Turnout on the Atlantic Coast (perhaps 7 or 8 percent of the national VAP) was certainly a good deal lower. And of course self-reporting is likely to exaggerate turnout. From 75% to 77% would seem a good estimate of national turnout in that election.

⁵³ For comparison see Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi, Pippa Norris, eds., Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), pp 16-19. Table 1.3 in this volume shows that of 44 electoral regimes only Brazil and the Philippines have voting ages under 18, 30% have compulsory voting, one third have at least some voting by mail. In Latin America, all have compulsory voting except Colombia. There is reason to believe that absent compulsory voting, turnout in many of these cases would be substantially lower, and that would mean substantially lower than Nicaraguan turnout. See Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," op cit., pp. 8-9.

Of 20 democracies examined by G. Bingham Powell, in 16 registration is initiated by government. In Australia and New Zealand citizens must take the initiative but are legally required to do so and subject to penalties for failure. Only the United States and France leave registration to voluntary citizen initiative, and France requires local identity registration, facilitating voter registration. "American Voter Turnout," op cit., p. 21.

El Salvador has the same kind of electoral system, but a considerably older, and somewhat better educated and less poor electorate; and El Salvador is a considerably smaller country than Nicaragua, less mountainous, with little jungle and, in much of the country, a considerably better transportation infrastructure.⁵⁴ Comparison of the age profiles of the two electorates is particularly significant: the Nicaraguan electorate is much younger than the Salvadoran electorate. The voting age in Nicaragua is 16, whereas in Salvador it is 18. Thirty-five to forty percent of the Nicaraguan electorate is under 25 years of age and about half of that is under 20, whereas only about 25% of the Salvadoran electorate is under 25, and less than half of that is under 20. As to the comparative education profiles, about 35-40% of the Salvadoran electorate has completed high school, whereas only about 25-30% of the Nicaraguan electorate has completed high school. In each case, about half of those who have completed high school have some post-high school education, but it appears that significantly more of that group have relatively extensive university education in Salvador (perhaps 15% of the electorate) than in Nicaragua (perhaps 10% of the electorate).⁵⁵ Yet, for all of this,

⁵⁴ The Nicaraguan electoral system does have one major advantage over the Salvadoran system: decentralized residential voting (see note 50 above). The Salvadoran system makes travel to voting places burdensome for the poor. Note, however, that in Nicaragua turnout has been high even in remote areas where low population density and high dispersion (and absence of modern transport) mean that people do have to travel for hours to reach registration and voting places.

A second difference between the two systems should favor higher turnout in El Salvador: In Nicaragua there has been no system of on-going registration (see note 49 above), whereas El Salvador does have such a system. In El Salvador, once one has registered and one's name is listed in the padron, one is not required to re-register for each election, unless one moves one's place of residence and voting. The deadline for initiating first-time registration is four months in advance of election day, as in Nicaragua, but if such initiation was made at some point in the past, there is no legal deadline for completing the process, even if one has never yet been successful in obtaining a voting document. However, the process involved in turning an initial application into actual possession of a voting document (carnet) can be difficult, lengthy, and costly for those whose birth certificates cannot be located -- many have found it impossible.

Prior to 1988, voting was technically mandatory in El Salvador, and registration somewhat less complicated. At least (or particularly) with regard to the 1982 constituent assembly election, it was considered to be dangerous to fail to vote. Soldiers and police would frequently ask to see the identity documents on which certification of having voted was to be stamped, in a context in which the FDR-FMLN had called for a boycott of the election, and death squads linked to the army and the police were killing on the order of 800 people every month for suspected links to the FDR-FMLN. Defense Minister Garcia advised the public that failure to vote would constitute treason, while electoral authorities advised that abstention equaled "support for subversion." Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview, 1995), pp. 156, 159. James Dunkerley, Power in the Isthmus (London: Verso, 1988), p. 405; Gary Bland, "Assessing the Transition to Democracy," in Joseph Tulchin, ed., Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador? (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), p. 197.

⁵⁵ I've calculated these age and education profiles of the two countries based on examination of the

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Salvadoran registration rates are considerably lower, and voting rates much lower, than Nicaraguan rates.⁵⁶

In the March 1994 Salvadoran "Elections of the Century," 1.45 million people cast ballots, out of an in-country voting age population probably on the order of 2.75 million, for a turnout of about 53%. It appears that something over 85% of VAP initiated the registration process, but that considerably fewer (perhaps under 80% of VAP) fully completed the process.⁵⁷ On election day, in addition to the 53% who voted, it appears that perhaps another 6 percent or so of the voting age

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sample designs and the results of multiple polls over the years 1989-1996. I need to check this against whatever aggregate statistics are available, though such statistics are probably no more, and possibly less, reliable than the calculations I've made. Nicaraguan education levels are probably even lower than I've indicated because the polls under-sample remote areas where education beyond partial primary school would be virtually non-existent.

⁵⁶ To set the foregoing points out differently, according to the analysis of Seligson, et al, based on surveys of urban populations only, from 50 years of age up, the two electorates vote at about the same rates (Nicaraguan turnout goes down quite a lot sometime after age 60, whereas Salvadoran turnout does not). Between the ages of 20 and 50, Nicaraguan voter turnout is about 20 percent higher than Salvadoran turnout, and among the youngest segments of the electorate, Nicaraguan turnout is about 35% higher than Salvadoran turnout. See Mitchell A. Seligson, et al, "Who Votes in Central America? A Comparative Analysis," in Seligson and John Booth, eds., Elections and Democracy in Central America Revisited (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), graph on page 169. In Nicaragua, turnout among people between the ages of 30 and 59 is only 10-15% greater than turnout among the youngest part of the electorate, whereas in El Salvador, turnout goes up steeply after age 25, and among those over 40 turnout is 30-40 points higher than among the youngest segment of the electorate. See Table 7.3, Ibid at p. 170. According to Seligson, et al, in neither country (in these urban samples) does education make a significant difference in turnout, except for the fact that in El Salvador those with postsecondary education have 20% higher turnout than those with less than seven years of education (we would probably see more differential by education in El Salvador were the rural electorate included). See Table 7.3. The absolute numbers for turnout are of course inflated given that they are based on self-reporting (in the U.S. survey responses are thought to over-report voting by about 10-12%; in El Salvador over-reporting is certainly higher). Nonetheless, given the magnitude of the differences, the relative numbers are surely of some significance.

A variety of Salvador polls both from the months before the 1994 election and from November 1996 agree that 18-24 year olds are much less likely to have their voting documents than any other sector of the population - 15 to 30 points less. There is evidence that education made a major difference in turnout in the March 1997 Salvadoran election. In the IUDOP exit poll in the city of San Salvador, the least educated sector of the electorate (less than 6th grade education) was vastly under-represented while those with some university education were vastly over-represented. Those with middling levels of education were represented in close proportion to their representation in the voting age population.

⁵⁷ Tommie Sue Montgomery gives 421,000 as number of voting document applications which did not lead to voting documents in the hands of the applicants by election day. Revolution in El Salvador, 2nd ed., p. 263. That would be approximately 15% of VAP. My estimates on these questions are also based on my 1994 interviews with U.S. embassy political officer Jim Caragher (who, in early January, estimated that 85% of VAP had initiated registration, about one third of whom had yet to receive a voting documents; he hoped that by election day, 95% of those who had initiated registration would have a voting document in hand), and ONUSAL official Francisco Cobos.

population made some attempt to vote but were disallowed or gave up trying after experiencing problems.⁵⁸ This would suggest that, at most, about 75% of registered voters, and about 60% of the voting age population, tried to vote. In the past, electoral turnout has always been under 1.2 million, with the exception of 1984, when it reached just over 1.5 million in the second round run-off (some believe that number to be inflated but accept the first round number of 1.4 million as probably accurate).⁵⁹ That highest vote in Salvadoran history represented a turnout in the neighborhood of 65% of VAP.⁶⁰ Turnout in the 1989 election was barely over one million, about 41% of VAP.

Another line of political science analysis regarding level of turnout emphasizes the degree to which institutional arrangements do or do not cause particular elections to stand out as important, decisive contests.⁶¹ But this does not seem a promising approach for our two cases since institutional arrangements do not make presidential elections more prominent or more decisive in one case than in the other, and, generally speaking, the 1994 Salvadoran election was surely at least as prominent a point in the political landscape as the 1996 Nicaraguan election and much more prominent than the 1984 Nicaraguan election.⁶² From this perspective, the failure of turnout in the 1994 Salvadoran

⁵⁸ See Jack Spence, David Dye, and George Vickers, El Salvador: Elections of the Century (Boston: Hemisphere Initiatives, July 1994), pp. 6-7, and report of March 23-April 9, 1994 (post first round) national poll (n = 3,400) by the ARENA pollster, Felipe Noguera.

⁵⁹ Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview, 1995), p. 180. I discount the 1982 constitutional convention elections (officially claimed turnout of 1.55 million) because many believe the results to have been fraudulently inflated, and because of the extreme level of fear and duress during this period, likely to have led to coerced voting. See note 25 above. On fraudulent inflation see "Las elecciones de 1982. Realidades detras de las apariencias," Estudios Centroamericanos (May-June 1982), pp. 403-04. Tommie Sue Montgomery reports that U.S. Ambassador Dean Hinton eventually acknowledged the merit of this analysis. *Op cit.*, p. 160. In October 1983 interviews, high-ranking members of both the PDC and ARENA admitted to North American scholar Terry Karl that they had submitted fraudulently inflated figures of voter turnout in the 1982 election. "Imposing Consent? Electoralism vs. Democratization in El Salvador," in Paul Drake and Eduardo Silva, eds., Elections and Democratization in Latin America, 1980-85 (San Diego: University of California Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies, 1986), p. 19, note 16.

⁶⁰ In-country VAP did not increase very much over the 1980s because of the large numbers of adults and adolescents leaving the country (as well as significant numbers killed).

⁶¹ Robert Jackman & Ross Miller, "Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies During the 1980s," Comparative Political Studies, V. 27, #4 (1995). Mark N. Franklin, "Electoral Participation," in Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi, Pippa Norris, eds., Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

⁶² Some versions of this approach emphasize that turnout is increased by partisan polarization - the existence of a sharp, competitive contest between polarized parties. Markus Crepaz, "The impact of

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"elections of the century" becomes particularly anomalous, since that election was extremely high profile, and enjoyed major international attention and major UN involvement. The absence of a tight contest might be blamed, but the question of whether the leading candidate, ARENA's Armando Calderon Sol, would achieve 50% of the vote and thus avoid a runoff was as close as it could be. And the contest was very tight in the March 1997 Salvadoran legislative and municipal elections, yet turnout fell to the lowest level of any free election in Salvadoran history (38% of VAP).⁶³

A third line of analysis within the political science literature regarding level of turnout is of more immediate help in resolving our puzzle. In the literature, closer examination of the impact of voter registration procedures, and of the reasons for increased voting with education and age, lead to an emphasis on the relative presence or absence in society, and in peoples' lives, of resourceful political actors providing information, assistance, and mobilization to the non-self-starters in the electorate, particularly the poor and the less educated.⁶⁴ In other words, where such mobilizing agents are present to promote politicization among the poor, to help with registration, and to promote voter turnout on election day, the poor and less educated are more likely to vote. Everywhere the young tend not to be reached by such mobilizing agents (because of their relative lack of contact with the social networks that serve as conduits), and everywhere turnout is lowest among the youngest segment of the electorate. Across the world history of electoral democracy, the degree to which such mobilizing agents have been active and have targeted the poor and less educated has varied greatly

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party polarization and postmaterialism on voter turnout," European Journal of Political Research, 19:183-205 (1990). But the same kind of partisan confrontation that existed in Nicaragua in 1990 also existed in El Salvador's 1994 "Elections of the Century" -- unless we put all of the emphasis on competitiveness. But Nicaragua had fairly high turnout in 1984 without either high polarization or high competitiveness, and during the 1989-90 campaign, most Nicaraguans did not view that election as a very tight competition -- except perhaps during the last three weeks (up until the FSLN's giant final campaign rally, four days before election day, which seemed to confirm the wide FSLN lead shown by the most publicized polls). In 1996, the Nicaraguan election did not look tight until the last two months, but there were major mobilizational efforts on both sides at the end of the campaign. The March 1997 Salvadoran parliamentary elections exhibited both partisan polarization between left and right and a very close contest, but turnout fell to 38% of VAP.

⁶³The March 1997 election, encompassing both the entire national legislature and all of the country's municipal governments, was a much more prominent event on the Salvadoran political landscape than are non-presidential ("off-year") elections in other countries with presidential systems, both because of the scope of the election and because, for the first time in history, pre-election polling showed the Left in the lead.

⁶⁴ Rosenstone and Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America, op cit.; Piven and Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote, op cit.

in different times and places, and that has made for major differences in turnout.

Those who contend that education leads to higher registration and voting argue that education provides knowledge, skills, and experience which produce willingness and ability to deal with formalities, requirements, forms, waiting lines, deadlines. What much of the political science literature does not dwell on is that such factors have not been important in all cases. The uneducated vote in most of Europe and they voted for most of the nineteenth century in the United States. The foregoing factors seem to become important only where registration or voting is experienced as intimidating by the less educated and they don't have anyone to help them with it - where the system says, in effect, we're only going to let you vote if you first prove to us that you can negotiate this obstacle course, on your own, without help. Once the less educated experience the system as saying that, most will not be brought to give it a second try by minimal or low profile reforms - they will have to be mobilized by political actors seeking to bring them into the electorate.

Throughout post-World War II Europe, government has carried out voter registration and parties and unions have engaged in grass-roots mobilization. Voter turnout has been high, including among the poor and less educated. In the nineteenth century United States there were no registration requirements in the great majority of states, and political parties engaged in extensive grass-roots mobilization of white males. Voting was an integral part of white male working class and lower middle class culture, regardless of education. Turnout was high. This began to change in 1877 with the end of Reconstruction in the South and the repression of Black political organization and activism. Between 1896 and the 1920s, registration requirements were adopted everywhere in the United States, with the purpose both of eliminating fraudulent voting (organized by corrupt political machines) and of disenfranchising the "ignorant" and the "unAmerican" (which meant the non-white and the non-English-speaking). Registering to vote became part of a culture of officials and rules - white, middle class officials and rules -- intended to be intimidating to the poor. Additionally, political parties greatly cut-back their grass-roots mobilizing (as elections became non-competitive within the South and within most of the North). Turnout plummeted, particularly in the South, where Black voting completely disappeared over the decade of the 1890s (from a high of over 50% in 1876). In the South of the first half of the 20th century, total turnout was only 20-25% of VAP. During the 1930s, industrial labor unions and the Democratic Party revived grass-roots mobilization and conducted voter registration drives (except in the South), and turnout among the poor, workers, and the less educated increased. Such efforts lapsed after the 1930s and turnout declined again. In the 1960s, the civil rights

movement and legal challenges to discriminatory registration and voting laws led to an increase in Black voting in the South from about 20% to about 70% (according to self-reporting in surveys). After the decline of the civil rights movement, black turnout slipped, though not all the way back to its 1950s levels.⁶⁵

Another way of stating the foregoing arguments: Turnout depends on people experiencing voting as both important and accessible. When answering survey questions, most people will say that they favor democracy and voting, and that both are important.⁶⁶ But the degree to which such themes become powerful elements of people's thinking and feeling, and the degree to which they translate into actual political behavior (such as turning out to vote), varies greatly depending on the balance of encouraging versus discouraging influences contained in concrete situations, experiences and events. Where landlords and the military have always seemed to have much more power over rural life than elected officials, the rural poor are less likely to see elections for government offices as important. Where that changes decisively, turnout for such elections may go up. Where it changes only gradually and incrementally, turnout may not go up absent mobilizing forces.

The "accessibility" of registration and voting depends not only on complexity of procedures, and the time and expense involved in appearing at the places of registration and voting, but also on the social distance between the would-be voter and the officials with whom he or she must deal in the course of the registration and voting processes. The importance of this latter factor was clear in the U.S. South at least through the end of the 1960s, as Black citizens were routinely intimidated or humiliated by the uniformly white staff of registration and voting places. Something similar has happened to the Indian populations of Mexico and Central America. Sectors of a population that feel that the public realm is foreign territory, who do not feel themselves to be citizens of that public realm,

⁶⁵ On the history described in the foregoing paragraph, see the sources cited in the preceding note, particularly Piven and Cloward, and also Robert H. Wiebe, Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). People who are intimidated by the culture of officials and rules surrounding registration and voting are unlikely to go out of their way (or to incur opportunity costs) to take part in that culture absent some special "invitation" or powerful provocation.

⁶⁶ A life-time of exposure to modern media (often in addition to some formal education) means that almost everyone has in their heads at least bits and pieces of whatever themes are presented as positive and legitimate in a frequent and sustained way in such media. Democracy and voting have received high levels of repeated positive reference throughout the western hemisphere in recent decades. Thus almost everyone has come to have some positive thoughts on the subject. In both Nicaragua and El Salvador surveys show high support for democracy in the abstract.

are unlikely to register and vote except under duress or bribery.⁶⁷ It is noteworthy in this regard that in both the 1994 and 1997 election seasons, the Salvadoran TSE's extensive television advertisements promoting voter education, registration and turnout on election day pictured and employed as narrators exclusively well-dressed, light-skinned, European-featured, clearly upper and middle class people. As far as the majority of Salvadorans could see, these messages were not addressed to them and the world of voter registration and voting was not populated by people like them. The analogous CSE advertisements in Nicaragua in 1989-90 featured a wider range of social types.

If we look at our puzzle from the foregoing perspective, and compare the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran "elections of the century" (1990 and 1994 respectively), we immediately see two "assisting" forces that took stronger and more effective action in Nicaragua than in El Salvador: the United States government and the national electoral authorities. We need to look at (1) the difference between U.S. policy toward the 1990 Nicaraguan election campaign and U.S. policy toward the 1994 Salvadoran election campaign, and (2) the difference between the performance of the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral - CSE) in 1989-90, and the performance of the Salvadoran Supreme Electoral Tribunal (Tribunal Supremo Electoral - TSE) in 1993-94.⁶⁸

The net result of the above factors was that in 1989-90 the Nicaraguan opposition received much more help mobilizing those who were passively disaffected from the incumbent government (the non-self-starters re electoral participation) than did the opposition in El Salvador in 1994. Prior to the 1996 Nicaraguan election, we might have thought that these two factors (the U. S. role and the performance of the electoral authorities) provided all the explanation we needed to resolve our puzzle.

⁶⁷ On such sentiments among non-voters in El Salvador, see Miguel Cruz, "Ausentismo en las elecciones: algunas hipotesis y reflexiones desde las encuestas," *Estudios Centroamericanos*, Nos. 545-546, marzo-abril 1994. The thrust of this article is that in El Salvador, most of those who are "indeciso" in the pre-election polls are really thoroughly alienated from existing politics and do not vote. They do not take part in the psychology of polarization and they see no alternative to it that might attract them into politics. The entry of the left into electoral politics has not brought these people in. They have no confidence in the world of public institutions. This is linked to profound historical inequality of socio-political participation in all arenas. Cruz's theme is related to that of Ruben Zamora's writings on historical exclusion of the popular classes from the realms of power. See, for example, "Partidos y cultura politica: instrumento u obstaculo?" in Stefan Roggenbuck, ed., *Cultural Politica en El Salvador* (San Salvador: Fundacion Konrad Adenauer, 1995). In Salvador the poor majority remains imprinted by the culture of passivity/risk-averseness imparted by the Matanza of 1932 and subsequent repression. That is similar to Guatemala and different from Nicaragua.

⁶⁸ There was, in addition, a third "assisting" force active in Nicaragua -- Cardinal Obando y Bravo and the Catholic hierarchy. This force may have been particularly effective in encouraging turnout among those otherwise least likely to vote -- the most traditionalist of the poor.

If that were true, then, in terms of voter turnout, Nicaragua 1996 should have turned out more or less like Salvador 1994. That indeed is what I predicted; but that is not what happened.⁶⁹ In fact, Nicaraguan voter turnout was still high in 1996, despite the relative absence of effective "assisting" forces, i.e., the low profile of the U.S. government and the relatively poor performance by the CSE.⁷⁰ This does not mean that we should discount the importance of the U. S. role or of the performance of the electoral authorities; those two factors certainly do provide an important part of the answer to our puzzle. But clearly there is a major piece of the puzzle still missing. Nonetheless, these two factors certainly do provide a part of the answer to our puzzle, so we need to look at them.

Electoral Administration. This is a complex subject, and I will only touch on it here.⁷¹ As to

⁶⁹ In an article written in mid-1995, I predicted Arnaldo Aleman's victory in the October 1996 presidential election, but also predicted a low turnout. "Reading Nicaraguan Political Culture Through the Lens of the 1989-1990 PreElection Polling Controversy," op cit. In presentations made during the year before the October 1996 election, I offered the following comparison of the 1990 Nicaraguan, and 1994 Salvadoran and Mexican elections:

Nicaragua in 1989-90, and Salvador and Mexico in 1994, all had powerful, somewhat authoritarian incumbents, holding the most free and fair elections ever, spending a lot of money on the campaign and trying to associate themselves with strength and stability, while trying to associate their main opponents with violence, instability, and lack of preparation to govern -- sending the message to the risk-averse voter that to put the opposition into power would be dangerous. Four months before election day, polls in all three cases showed very large undecideds. In no case did either the incumbent party or the opposition command a partisan majority. In Mexico and Salvador, incumbents won the elections in large part because of the inertia of the disaffected and the inexperience, division, and disorganization of the opposition, and with the help of the incumbent's control of the election system and use of patronage. The opposition could not get the risk-averse vote (many abstained). In Nicaragua, by contrast, the passively disaffected and the risk-averse turned out to vote at high levels and they voted for the opposition, despite the opposition's high level of inexperience, internal division, and disorganization. That internal division, and the inertia of the disaffected, were temporarily overcome, and the opposition's lack of experience and preparation to govern was rendered irrelevant, by the fact that the United States was strongly backing the opposition. The difference between Nicaragua on one hand, and Mexico and Salvador on the other hand, was in how the risk-averse voters saw the likely consequences of voting the opposition into power -- in Nicaragua they could believe that surely big brother would not allow an opposition government to fail; therefore putting such government into power was really the less risky alternative (given that, even if one did not believe that reelection of Daniel Ortega would mean continuing U.S. support for the Contra war, it was clear that no Sandinista government would ever have positive support, and help demobilizing the Contra, from the United States).

The implication of this analysis for the 1996 election was that without this special powerful encouragement to vote, provided by strong U.S. support for one of the political options, the passively disaffected of Nicaragua would act more like their Salvadoran counterparts -- they would abstain from voting.

⁷⁰ Though as I described in section IV above, at the last minute Cardinal Obando and the Catholic hierarchy did enter onto the electoral stage.

⁷¹ It is addressed in considerable detail in a series of reports by Hemisphere Initiatives, sometimes

(continued...)

the mechanics of registering and voting, Nicaragua, with a considerably smaller voting age population (see appendix), sets up a larger number of registration offices and a larger number of voting places. In both countries the goal is to have no more than 400 registered voters assigned to a polling station. Nicaragua succeeds in registering a higher percentage of its voters than does El Salvador, but ends up with substantially less than 400 assigned voters at many voting stations. More important is the question of the clustering of polling stations. Both countries use a model in urban areas of placing polling stations together in clusters. The major clusters in Managua may include as many as a dozen polling stations, though few exceed seven. By contrast, in San Salvador the cluster at the Feria (a fairgrounds) included over 300 polling stations. I observed a great deal of congestion and confusion at the Feria on election day 1994 as over 60,000 voters searched for their polling stations. Not only did people who came to vote sometimes give up in frustration after a period of trying and failing to find their mesa, people approaching the fair grounds and watching television coverage were discouraged from even attempting to vote by the evident disorganization and long lines, and the complaints voiced by people on their way out. The Salvadoran administrative procedure of clustering very large numbers of polling stations together serves both as a disincentive to voting on election day and to impart a sense of disorder both to actual voters who experience the confusion first hand whether or not they succeed in finding their polling station, and to all those who observe the situation, thereby eroding confidence in the electoral process and the legitimacy of the results.

In addition to the problem of over-clustering polling stations in El Salvador, there is the issue of assigning voters to polling stations. Nicaragua uses a system similar to the precinct system in the United States, whereby polling stations are distributed through all urban neighborhoods and one's current residence determines where one votes. In El Salvador, by contrast, voting stations are highly clustered rather than distributed, and one is assigned to one's mesa by a combination of geographic (place of residence) and alphabetic criterion (first letter of last name). At a minimum, the Salvadoran procedure requires that a good number of voters travel some distance from their place of residence,

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in conjunction with the Washington Office on Latin America. Two such reports are: Jack Spence, David R. Dye and George Vickers, El Salvador: Elections of the Century: Results, Recommendations, Analysis (Cambridge, MA and San Salvador, El Salvador: Hemisphere Initiatives, July 1994); and Judy Butler, David R. Dye and Jack Spence, Democracy and Its Discontents: Nicaraguans Face the Election (Cambridge, MA: Hemisphere Initiatives, October 1, 1996). See also Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, op cit., pp. 247-52.

Ken Coleman helped draft an earlier version of the following two subsections. While Ken deserves credit, he should not be held responsible for what I have done with it in the end.

in contrast to the Nicaraguan practice. This obviously suppresses turnout among the poor, as has been widely argued by Salvadoran analysts for years.

As to the relative performance of the Salvadoran TSE and the Nicaraguan CSE, the Nicaraguan body has clearly out-performed its Salvadoran counterpart, particularly comparing the 1990 election in Nicaragua to the first round of the 1994 Salvadoran election. Even in 1996, while beset by last-minute changes in the electoral law that imposed substantial administrative reorganization on the Supreme Electoral Council, and significantly reduced the levels of experience, training, and professionalism at some levels within the institution, the attitude of most Nicaraguan electoral officials was clearly to "walk the extra mile" in helping citizens to overcome obstacles both in the registration process and on election day (when CSE officials worked to address a variety of logistical and organizational problems, after themselves having been up all night working and knowing they faced another night without sleep). And such positive attitudes had been even more characteristic of the CSE in the course of the 1990 electoral processes.⁷²

By contrast, El Salvador has a history of lesser professionalism and commitment on the part of electoral officials (TSE magistrates are nominated by, and have often appeared loyal to, the main political parties), as well as lesser commitment to electoral procedures by parties on the right and on the left (at least up until 1989 on the part of the right and up until 1994 on the part of the main body of the left). At best, the Salvadoran TSE often seemed to exhibit ambivalence about simplifying registration procedures, mounting programs to effectively assist citizens with completing registration, and putting into place election-day programs to help citizens locate their voting station and prove to station officials that they were in fact legally registered. At moments, the political will to ensure mass participation in electoral processes has clearly been lacking. For example, the 1993 registration process was a disaster until ONUSAL stepped in:

[In late 1993] ONUSAL had to step in with massive logistical support to ensure success in registering an estimated 786,000 adults; it had to flatter, cajole, and bully the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to do the job it was created to do. In addition, ONUSAL officials were reduced to "ant work" -- going to municipalities to look up individual birth certificates, without which one could not register to vote -- because the TSE was incapable of doing it, many mayors were unwilling to help, and the legitimacy of the election after twelve years of

⁷² The Supreme Electoral Council was established in 1984 and had institutional autonomy from the beginning. Under the leadership of Mariano Fiallos, a University of Kansas Ph.D., it developed a dedicated and effective professional staff. See the reports on the 1990 election by the Carter Center and by the Latin American Studies Association.

civil war depended in large part on a high level of voter registration and participation.⁷³ Nominally, fears of fraud have led to the adoption of highly restrictive registration and voting procedures in El Salvador,⁷⁴ but it sometimes appears that election officials seek not only to prevent fraud, but also to deter "excessive voting." Rather than being dedicated to fulfilling the right of all Salvadoran citizens to exercise the suffrage, their general approach has been closer to "we, as election officials, cannot be too cautious."

In Salvador, TSE officials have known that they cannot get the concerted and sustained support of a legislative majority or of officials and agencies of the executive branch of government for strong (and expensive) efforts to fix problems of electoral administration. TSE officials have not had the political independence or the political will to aggressively challenge that status quo or to be highly creative in doing the best with what they have and inspiring dedication and superhuman effort by TSE staff.⁷⁵ In Nicaragua, the CSE did have such support and such political will, particularly in 1989-90. As I have explained above, much literature on voter turnout in established democracies draws the conclusion that complicated and burdensome registration procedures are a powerful deterrent to voting among the poor and less educated, particularly when combined with the absence of effective assistance in the negotiation of such procedures. The truth of this analysis was obvious in El Salvador in the elections of 1989, 1991 and 1994. No one could miss it. Yet the ARENA government and the electoral authorities dragged their feet on implementing reforms between 1989 and 1996. A major reform package lay dormant in the legislature, blocked by the ARENA majority, with no pressure for passage from the Calderon Sol administration. The only major reforms actually implemented for the March 1997 election were an increase in the number of voting stations (but no decentralization) and

⁷³ Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 247. See also the comments of journalist Tom Gibb on the 1991 legislative elections, "Elections and the Road to Peace," in Joseph Tulchin, ed., Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador? (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 19-20.

⁷⁴ See Enrique A. Baloyra-Herp, "Elections, Civil War, and Transition in El Salvador," in Elections and Democracy in Central America Revisited (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 49. Montgomery, *op cit.*, p. 180.

⁷⁵ In a March 13, 1997 television interview on San Salvador's Channel 12, TSE magistrate Felix Ulloa acknowledged the great organizational problems of the 1994 election, and stated that the TSE had neither the authority nor the capacity to correct those problems. Ulloa argued that effective corrective action was the responsibility of the legislative and executive branches of government, and they had failed to act. The TSE could only try to compensate for the problems, e.g., by contracting with bus companies to provide free transportation to voters on election day and by trying to relieve conditions of over-crowding in voting places. (I saw very few free buses on the streets of San Salvador on election day.)

some streamlining of the process of completing registration. Turnout in this highly competitive election was only 38% of VAP.

Links of the Disaffected to External Sponsors: Outside the consolidated democracies (and in the United States as well), people who are highly negative, uncomfortable or ambivalent about the world of electoral politics, including those disaffected from the existing regime or dissatisfied with the socio-economic status quo, tend not to vote, unless bribed or coerced. Opposition political parties find it difficult to get this natural constituency to turn out on election day. In the case of Nicaragua 1989-90, however, the Sandinista government and the U.S. government, in combination, made it possible for the opposition to solve this problem when it probably could not have done so on its own, given its history of fragmentation, personalism, and organizational ineptitude. The U.S. government not only provided funds, resources, and technical assistance, it virtually engineered the unification of the opposition into the UNO electoral alliance. And the United States kept the pressure on to maintain UNO unity throughout the campaign. Groups funded and advised by U.S. government agencies targeted the passively disaffected, with the express purpose of turning would-be abstainers into opposition voters. The Sandinista government gave a decisive assist to the opposition's chances of fully mobilizing the disaffected, via electoral law and voter registration reforms, the Supreme Electoral Council voter education campaign, accepting a massive international observer presence, and allowing foreign assistance to opposition-linked voter education groups. The Sandinistas went the extra mile because they needed to prove to the world that the election was exemplary; they didn't hesitate because they felt completely confident of winning.⁷⁶

U.S. policy toward Nicaragua during the two and a half years prior to the February 1990 election emphasized a massive and continuing effort (1) to engineer unification of the anti-Sandinista opposition and the eclipse of the attempt of a group of parties to forge a center-left opposition bloc -- ensuring that there would be only one major opposition alliance rather than two; (2) to convince the disaffected and those of mixed views (who were generally skeptical of the opposition and of the possibility of defeating the FSLN) to take the elections and the opposition seriously -- making them believe that the United States was committed to UNO and would not let it fail, before or after the

⁷⁶ A year later, former Secretary General of the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry, Alejandro Bendana commented, "If we had left it to UNO itself, they never would have won" (panel at April 1991 LASA congress, Washington, D.C.). For analysis of the FSLN's over-confidence re winning the election see my articles cited in note 29, above.

election; (3) to ensure UNO acceptance of and continuing unity behind the presidential candidacy of Violeta Chamorro.⁷⁷ As William Robinson has written:

"A flood of visitors raced to Managua from Washington to oversee unity negotiations. These visitors brought one overriding message: 'It is essential that the opposition understand that failure to unify jeopardizes external assistance.' One top opposition leader confessed, 'The pressures on me from the [U.S.] Embassy to join are really intense. They are distributing a lot of cash; it's difficult to resist.'" (52)

In the summer of 1988, a National Endowment for Democracy [NED] official argued that

"the United States should bring its resources and pressures to bear on the opposition so that it unified. [She] insisted that a majority of the Nicaraguan electorate was undecided. An abstention from this undecided bloc would favor the FSLN. So U.S. strategy should be to provide would-be abstainers with incentives for casting their lot with the opposition." (51)

NED planned to package Violeta Chamorro as the "Cory Aquino of Nicaragua." Her husband, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, murdered by Somoza cronies in 1978, was a national hero.

"Respect for his memory would maintain opposition unity and win popular support. Violeta Chamorro....was thus a 'unity candidate,' and someone who could attract the votes of would-be abstainers. Chamorro's nomination would 'assure that the vote will be not only an election, but also a plebiscite on Sandinista rule,' noted [NED president] Carl Gershman." (58)

International and U.S. efforts peaked during the last several months of the Nicaraguan 1989-1990 election campaign, inundating Managua with media, U.S. government contractors, and NGO staff. Opposition sentiments became the center of world attention, and Nicaraguans were encouraged, as no people had ever been encouraged before, to freely express in the voting booth whatever degree of such sentiment they might feel.⁷⁸ This created something of a "Hawthorne effect."

⁷⁷ See chapters 3-6 of William I. Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), especially his discussion of activities of the National Democratic Institute in Chapter 3; see also Robinson's *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Page numbers attached to the following quotations refer to *Faustian Bargain*. That book is a gold mine of information on this subject. However, as should be clear from the first and last two sections of this paper, I disagree with a good number of Robinson's normative and theoretical judgments.

⁷⁸ If the same amount of money were to be spent, per capita, in the United States targeting the passively disaffected, encouraging and assisting them to register and to get to the polls on election day and vote their disaffection, who knows what the results would be. U.S. presidents typically are elected by the votes of only a little more than one quarter of the voting age population -- Daniel Ortega got the votes of a higher percentage of the voting age population in his 1990 landslide loss to Violeta Chamorro

(continued...)

The net effect was that at a critical juncture, the U.S. intervened to stimulate, facilitate, and support electoral participation by groups that had little or no record of electoral success or effectiveness and who doubted their own ability to compete effectively with the incumbent party -- exactly the kinds of groups that in most times and places would have a hard time mounting effective electoral mobilization efforts. Those groups participated and ended up winning the presidential elections, a strong positive reinforcement for electoral participation.

In contrast, the Salvadoran groups most uncertain that the electoral process offered them a fair opportunity to demonstrate popular support and win governmental office were those on the left. A few elements of the left began returning to open politics within El Salvador in 1988. They competed in the presidential elections of 1989 and the legislative elections of 1991. The U.S. government was not "engaged with" such groups as an external sponsor, as it had been an external sponsor of the anti-Sandinista opposition in Nicaragua. As elements of the left began to participate in electoral politics in El Salvador, they did not receive the positive reinforcement that historically disaffected elements in Nicaragua received during and after their participation in the 1990 Nicaraguan elections (although the United States did support the Salvadoran peace negotiations from 1989 to 1992). Subsequently, while the United States supported the administrative organization of Salvador's 1994 "Elections of the Century," as well as supported some voter education and registration campaigns, the U.S. used neither threats nor substantial inducements to encourage the main body of the Salvadoran left, the FMLN, or those who sympathized with it, to participate in the elections. The Salvadoran left as a whole did enter and vigorously contest those elections. But, to the best of my knowledge, the U.S. government made no efforts to minimize abstention by inducing historically disaffected elements in El Salvador to participate in electoral processes, as the United States had done on a massive scale in Nicaragua. And when major problems of registration and electoral administration emerged in El Salvador (including fraud in 1991),⁷⁹ arguably prejudicing the opposition, the United States, while it pressured the TSE to do its job, remained strictly neutral as between the opposition and the incumbent party, rather than vigorously backing opposition complaints against the incumbent, as it had during the run-up to the

(...continued)

than Ronald Reagan got in his 1984 landslide victory over Walter Mondale.

⁷⁹ See Gary Bland, "Assessing the Transition to Democracy," in Tulchin, ed., Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador?, op cit., p. 183; Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, op cit., pp. 222-23.

1990 election in Nicaragua.

Thus, in El Salvador, during the years of the culmination of the "transition to democracy," instead of the main U.S. influence on political culture being the sustained and systematic promotion of the politicization and organization of sentiments of disaffection from the incumbent regime, as in Nicaragua, the main U.S. influence was the penetration of U.S. entertainment/celebrity/consumer culture via cable television, extensive commercial building (funded by monies originating in U.S. economic and military assistance during the 1980s), and purchasing power based on remittances from family members in the United States. Young people coming of voting age under such circumstances are poor candidates for politicization or electoral mobilization.

Relative performance of national election authorities and the level and character of involvement of the U.S. government certainly do help to explain our turnout puzzle. But, as I suggested earlier, in light of the high voter turnout in the 1996 Nicaraguan election, it seems clear that these factors are by no means the whole story.

VI. Clarification Via Comparative History

I do not have a full answer to our turnout puzzle, but an important part of the answer lies in what happened to the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran center-lefts of the 1970s -- the different fates that they met in each country at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, and also how the political culture of both the right and the popular classes was affected in each country by the events of the 1980s. These factors combined to produce turnout-encouraging changes in popular political culture, and in levels of politicization and mobilization during election season, in Nicaragua that did not take place in El Salvador. Despite the continuing inability of the Nicaraguan center to establish durable political organizations or political unity, the Nicaraguan center-left (half-inside and half-outside the Sandinista regime during the 1980s) has had a strong impact on Nicaraguan political culture and civil society. Until the 1990s, the center-left had less opportunity and less impact in El Salvador, to the detriment of democratization.

In both countries, the second half of the 1970s were watershed years. In both countries the center-left, the historical champion of democratization, grew into a strong political force during those years, in large part through association with the Christian Base Community movement and the

politicization of middle class high school and university students. In both countries many center-left activists were killed and many others radicalized in those years. But as of 1979 the paths diverged. In the first years of the 1980s the killing off of the center-left not only continued in El Salvador, it expanded and accelerated greatly.⁸⁰ In Nicaragua it stopped. In both countries, the center divided in the wake of 1979, part going right (under encouragement and pressure from the Reagan administration) and part going left. But in Nicaragua the anti-democratic right had been decisively defeated by a coalition of left and center-left, and mass citizenship was subsequently legitimized during the 1980s (on both the left and the right). By contrast, in El Salvador the 1970s and early 1980s saw the anti-democratic right decisively defeat the center-left. And subsequently, even with elections and peace processes, the center-left only gradually and haltingly reemerged, while the anti-democratic right remained relatively strong, and mass citizenship remained to be fully legitimized or made credible to the poor majority.

In 1979 the left/center-left won in Nicaragua and the center-left lost in El Salvador. In Salvador the activists of the center-left mobilization of the 1970s were killed, driven out of politics, out of the country, or into the guerrilla left. The base organizations of the center-left were pulverized. Those activists who survived were completely separated from electoral politics, rendered wary of coming back into electoral politics when it became relatively safe to do so at the end of the 1980s. In Nicaragua, by contrast, such people remained in politics after the mobilizations of the 1970s, some within the FSLN, many as staff of government institutions, staff of center-left civil society, and activists of the political parties of the "participating opposition" (the "loyal opposition"). Many became disillusioned with the Sandinista regime and less involved in politics over the second half of the 1980s.⁸¹ But many turned their disillusionment into more sharply oppositional political activism during 1988-90 under the encouragement of the Esquipulas II peace process, the activities of the U.S.-government-funded National Democratic Institute (which broke with the Reagan administration's hostility toward the participating opposition), and then the Bush administration, the international community, and the 1989-90 election campaign.⁸² At the same time, after 1987, much of the FSLN

⁸⁰See William Stanley, The Protection Racket State (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

⁸¹Many were influenced by the debate over democracy vrs. vanguardism and revolution going on within the left in Italy, Spain, and Chile.

⁸²Much of the "participating opposition" became somewhat more anti-Sandinista than it had been

(continued...)

leadership moved toward greater political pragmatism and more serious accommodation of the forms of electoral and representative democracy. Disagreement and disrespect toward center-left conceptions of political democracy largely disappeared from their public discourse. Daniel Ortega's eloquent concession speech the morning after the February 25, 1990 election was a major landmark in such Sandinista movement toward accommodation with electoral democracy. In the wake of their election defeat, the Sandinistas engaged in several months of pronounced self-criticism regarding the anti-democratic side of their own past political practice.

What began to take shape in Nicaragua from the late 1970s on was not a fully democratic political culture but a new political culture with democratic elements and potentials -- because the Sandinista regime was never a fully leninist regime, but a mix of leninist and Gramscian marxists, middle class student radicals influenced by the New Left of Europe and the United States and/or by liberation theology, and center-left elements, all with a strong nationalist orientation. While the core leadership of the FSLN was leninist, their strong nationalism, the experience of the popular movement of the late 1970s, and Gramscian influences, led them to infuse the party and the regime with an emphasis on popular mobilization that was never simply manipulative, even if a vulgar vanguardism was often predominant.⁸³ At the same time, the fact that the FSLN regime needed to coopt center-left professionals, administrators, and technicians, to maintain some working relationship with at least some part of the bourgeoisie, and to maintain the support of European and Latin American social democrats, meant that the non-leninist and center-left elements within the Sandinista movement had

(...continued)

prior to 1985-86, but the great majority remained willing to participate under the 1987 constitution and to seek working arrangements with the FSLN. Some of what had earlier been more intransigent opposition moved in this direction, believing that their 1984 abstentionism had been a serious mistake. Most of the opposition leadership believed that the FSLN would win the 1990 presidential election (based on my extensive interviewing during 1994-96).

⁸³For well-balanced accounts of the ideology of the Sandinista leadership see Dennis Gilbert, Sandinistas (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Donald C. Hodges, Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); and, especially, Phil Ryan, The Fall and Rise of the Market in Sandinista Nicaragua (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). Interesting critical accounts can be found in Sandino's Daughters Revisited (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994). A one-sided but valuable anti-Sandinista account is David Nolan, The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution (Coral Gables: Institute of Interamerican Studies, 1984). One of the best sympathetic accounts is still George Black, Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (London: Zed Press, 1981). For a more up to date largely sympathetic account see Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost, Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

to be given real leadership responsibilities and substantial autonomy within certain spheres of the regime. The public discourse and practice of those elements, and their interactions with the "participating opposition," encouraged democratic political culture.

Given the foregoing, the discourse and practice of the Sandinista regime, and its interaction with the domestic opposition (at least of the Pacific plain and urban areas), drew the mass of the population into national political life, and popular political culture took on the ideas of mass citizenship, mass rights, popular voice, popular sovereignty, at least in the abstract. All political contenders, including the right, took up some version of this discourse. Democratic idealism was worn down by the Contra war and the economic hardships after 1986, and was contradicted by FSLN vulgar vanguardism, such that commitment to such idealism by much of the population (including Sandinista and anti-Sandinista elites) was not unambiguous and was never fully consolidated. But its legitimacy in principle was not negated, and was powerfully reaffirmed around the 1990 election.

Thus I would argue that the unusually high Nicaraguan voter turnout, and the contrast with El Salvador, are largely attributable to:

(1) almost 20 years of rhetorical emphasis on popular mobilization and popular voice, shared in one form or another by virtually all political forces. Nicaraguan political culture has developed a strong, widespread sense of the right of people in general to criticize and make demands on -- to talk back to -- the state and the political class;

(2) social distance between the poor majority and staff of government voter registration offices and polling places has not been much of a problem in Nicaraguan elections (except, in the case of the 1984 election, on the Atlantic Coast and in remote areas of the northern and central mountains). The FSLN regime put a strong positive emphasis on universal registration and on the accessibility of registration and voting, in part because the regime needed to prove its legitimacy to the world and knew its procedures would be closely scrutinized. The branch of government established to carry out elections, the Consejo Supremo Electoral, took its job very seriously, and developed a strong internal professionalism and pride (which was seriously compromised in 1996);

(3) Nicaraguans of all sectors felt that the 1990 elections were important (in part because of the massive attention given to those elections by the United States and the international community), and they had confidence in the Consejo Supremo Electoral. Nicaraguans had developed a positive attitude about voting -- voting was a right to be valued, a civic duty, an act to be proud of, whereas abstention would be at least a foolish mistake (as in 1984) if not disreputable, an act of political

cowardice. All pre-election polls, regardless of who they showed ahead in the presidential race, showed high levels of respect for the CSE, high levels of expectation that the elections would be honest and clean, and high levels of agreement that the Sandinista government was doing a good job on the administration of the electoral process (even those who stated an intention to vote for Violeta Chamorro largely agreed on these points). The CID-Gallup poll three months after the election showed 85% agreeing that the election had been honest and clean. These results are in sharp contrast to poll results on similar questions in El Salvador.⁸⁴ After the 1990 Nicaraguan elections, people - on all sides, both winners and losers - continued to feel the elections had been important. They felt that their votes had sent messages. The stories told in Nicaragua about the 1990 elections are stories about dramatic and important events, in which most Nicaraguans, both winners and losers, could find a reason to be proud. The people of El Salvador have a long history of telling very different kinds of stories about elections (particularly the elections of 1972 and 1977, blatantly stolen by the military -- causing the left in general to adopt the slogan "electoreros al basurero!" - advocates of elections to the trash heap!); here, at least until very recently, only winners, not losers and not abstainers, have ever felt pride in elections.

A note regarding international context: It is often assumed that the passing of the Cold War and the greater integration of the global political economy under the hegemony of democratic capitalist powers should make the "transition to democracy" easier. But in fact these developments do not mean that the international context is now simply favorable to democratization, particularly in small poor countries damaged in one way or another by the last spasms of the Cold War. The extent of popular political skepticism, cynicism, wariness, risk-averseness, sense of powerlessness, in these populations is stimulated and reinforced by the experience of intensifying globalization coming right

⁸⁴ But by 1993, polls showed Nicaraguans to have lost all confidence in government institutions and political parties generally, with large majorities typically registering at least somewhat negative attitudes. These numbers, similar to, and sometimes more negative than, Salvadoran survey results, were sustained through 1996. Yet turnout in the 1996 Nicaraguan election was high. Neither these kinds of attitudes, nor such attitudes as internal and external efficacy, are significantly more positive in Nicaragua than in El Salvador, hence they cannot explain the turnout puzzle. On attitudes in El Salvador see Kenneth M. Coleman, Jose Miguel Cruz and Peter Moore, "Retos para consolidar la democracia en El Salvador," *Estudios Centroamericanos*, No. 571-572, Mayo-Junio 1996, and Jack Spence, David Dye, Mike Lanchin, and Geoff Thale, *Chapultepec: Five Years Later*, (Boston: Hemisphere Initiatives, January 1997), pp. 7, 9-10. On attitudes in Nicaragua see Butler, Dye, and Spence, *Democracy and Its Discontents*, op. cit., pp. 7-11, and the articles in *Cultura Política y Transición Democrática en Nicaragua*, op. cit. See also John Booth and Mitchell Seligson, "Paths to Democracy and the Political Culture of Costa Rica, Mexico, and Nicaragua," in Larry Diamond, ed., *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

on top of those Cold War spasms, with virtually no breathing space in between -- both experiences conveying a sense of being at the mercy of powerful outside forces entirely beyond the control of national actors.

It is also significant that for the Third World left, the end of the Cold War and the end of the very idea of socialist revolution come at the same historical moment as the intensification of globalization of economics and media, and the full emergence of the "democracy industry" and the "permanent campaign." At the same time, there is no improvement at all in the socio-economic status of the poor and popular classes of the Third World, and no reduction in socio-economic inequality; in fact that inequality increases considerably. This is a very difficult environment for the left's attempt to fundamentally reformulate its socio-economic project, its political culture, and its strategy for achieving power. The path of least resistance leads from the old unrealism of utopian socialist developmentalist ideology and vanguardism to the new unrealism of the "modern model" of television campaigning and "virtual politics."⁸⁵ This is also a difficult environment for an authentic center-left, previously marginalized by the polarization of the Cold War, to try to reestablish itself as a major player.

It is particularly striking that in the case of El Salvador, during the historical moment when the center-left was crushed and driven out of politics, there occurred a massive commercialization of the "built environment" (in major urban areas, particularly San Salvador) and of the media environment. In El Salvador, during the years of the "transition to democracy," instead of the main U.S. influence on political culture being the sustained and systematic promotion of the politicization and organization of sentiments of disaffection from the incumbent regime, as in Nicaragua, the main U.S. influence was the penetration of U.S. entertainment/celebrity/consumer culture via cable television, extensive commercial building (funded by monies originating in U.S. economic and military assistance during the 1980s), and purchasing power based on massive remittances from family members living in the United States. Youth caught up in the global entertainment/celebrity industry and consumer culture are not good candidates for politicization. Exit and post-election polls indicate that they vote at low levels. To revive center-left popular mobilization in this new environment is very difficult.

⁸⁵ On the "modern model" and "virtual politics" see David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, "Patterns of Modern Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences," in Swanson and Mancini, eds., Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and their consequences (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1996).

VI. Conclusion: The Ups and Downs of Incomplete Democracies

All of the foregoing notwithstanding, the left (FMLN) did well in El Salvador's parliamentary and municipal elections of March 1997 (winning the local governments of almost all of the country's major municipalities and nearly matching ARENA in legislative deputies), and the center-left (in the person of winning mayoral candidate Hector Silva) did very well in the city of San Salvador. These successes, however, are limited. Everyone on the left recognizes that these victories represent political failure by ARENA (whose vote declined precipitously) as much or more than they represent political success by the left. Moreover, it should also be emphasized that turnout was only 38% of VAP, and it appears that both historical abstainers and youth newly come of voting age remained outside the process.⁸⁶ While the FMLN increased its parliamentary vote total by about 80,000 over its 1994 results, that total still represents only about 12% of VAP. By comparison, the FSLN received the votes of over 25% of the Nicaraguan VAP in the October 1996 election.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, I came away from May 1997 visits to Managua and San Salvador with the sense that near-term prospects both for the democratic left and for further development and consolidation of democracy in general are brighter in El Salvador than in Nicaragua. How can this be the case when, according to the analysis of this article, since 1979 the legitimation and enactment of mass citizenship and the presence of the center-left have been much stronger in Nicaragua than in El Salvador?

I can only outline the beginnings of an answer here. Most basically, I continue to insist on the significance of the fact that in Nicaragua electoral participation includes a far higher percentage of the poor than is the case in El Salvador (or in many other countries which claim the status of democracies).⁸⁸ Nicaraguan political actors, both right and left, must take that into account and we may well see future conjunctures where that is an important factor. Beyond that, there are both

⁸⁶ Preliminary evidence of this comes from the IUDOP exit poll in the city of San Salvador.

⁸⁷The FSLN received more votes in the October 1996 election than any party has ever received in any Salvadoran election, with the sole exceptions of the winning candidates in the 1984 and 1994 presidential runoffs -- this despite the fact that, because of El Salvador's larger population, the Salvadoran electorate has always been 20 to 35 percent larger than the Nicaraguan electorate. Armando Calderon Sol, in his 1994 landslide runoff victory, was supported by the same percentage of the electorate (30%) as supported Daniel Ortega in his 1990 landslide loss (and both slightly exceeded the percentage of VAP voting for Ronald Reagan in his landslide victory over Walter Mondale in the U.S. presidential election of 1984).

⁸⁸There is a considerable literature supporting the idea that high electoral turnout by the lower classes results in governments more likely to be attentive to lower class interests. See Lijphart, "Unequal Participation," *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5 and sources cited therein.

structural and conjunctural levels of explanation.

On one hand, it is remarkable that democratic tendencies could show as much staying power as they have over the last ten years in Nicaragua, a country reduced to the most abject poverty by the sustained efforts of the Reagan administration to destroy its economy.⁸⁹ More broadly, it is historically extraordinary that a country so poor, so institutionally underdeveloped, with such a violent and authoritarian history should have any degree of democracy at all.⁹⁰ So far as I am aware, no country has ever made a "transition to democracy" under economic conditions as adverse as those that have existed in Nicaragua since 1987 (the only somewhat equivalent case might be Haiti -- where prolonged occupation by U.S. and UN troops has been required). Economic conditions have been very difficult for the Salvadoran majority, but mass poverty is less extreme than in Nicaragua, and in aggregate terms, the Salvadoran economy has done much better than the Nicaraguan economy over the last decade. It does matter that the Salvadoran economy and infrastructure have long been more developed than the Nicaraguan, and that during the 1980s, U.S. policy was to support rather than to destroy the Salvadoran economy. The Sandinista movement broadly conceived, and the Nicaraguan center-left of the 1970s and 1980s, deserve credit for the fact that some degree of democratization has been achieved, with sufficient resilience to survive, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.⁹¹

On the other hand, opportunities for progress have been missed, or fumbled away, as the conjunctural product of choices, and failures of political practice, by particular Nicaraguan political actors. And recently some Salvadoran political actors have a better record. The marked political failures of the Nicaraguan center during the Chamorro administration and in the run-up to the 1996 election, the failure of the FSLN to effectively pursue internal democratization (and the repercussions

⁸⁹ Anti-Sandinista critics are correct to point out that serious policy errors by the FSLN government lead to some forms of economic deterioration beginning well before the war or other U.S. policies had much impact. That does not change the fact that U.S. military and economic policy was designed to devastate the Nicaraguan economy and infrastructure and succeeded in doing so, particularly during the second Reagan administration. See Michael E. Conroy, "The Political Economy of the 1990 Nicaraguan Elections," *International Journal of Political Economy*, 20, 3 (fall 1990).

⁹⁰See the works cited in note 1 above and J. Mark Ruhl, "Unlikely Candidates for Democracy: The Role of Structural Context in Democratic Consolidation," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Spring 1996, Vol. 31, no. 1; Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," in Gary Marks & Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992).

⁹¹ While I agree that there were constructive aspects to the involvement of the National Democratic Institute in Nicaragua during the late 1980s, I regard it as outrageous that the Central America policy-makers of the Reagan Administration claim credit for themselves for Nicaraguan democratization.

of that failure on coalition prospects), the effectively anti-democratic turn of the Catholic church hierarchy, and the entry onto the political scene of unreconstructed Somocistas from Miami have all contributed to the decline in near-term democratic prospects -- as we see epitomized in the last weeks of the 1996 election campaign and the first months of the Aleman administration. The capacity of the left and center-left to effectively champion democratization in Nicaragua has been badly hurt by the split between the FSLN and the MRS (the effects of the split per se greatly exacerbated by the level of personal bitterness and public recrimination between the leaderships of the two). By contrast, the splits in the FMLN have turned out to be less damaging, and the FMLN appears to be on its way to becoming an effective force for democratization in El Salvador. ARENA's reaction to the 1997 election results is also encouraging, particularly in comparison to the actions of the Aleman administration during its first months in office.⁹²

Finally, let me just remind the reader that in 1989-90 (both before and after the Nicaraguan election), the balance of prospects for further democratization in the two countries looked very different than it does today. The political situation in both countries at that point in time was open to a range of developments (though powerfully constrained both by structural realities of domestic and international economy and by outside actors), and the prospects for further democratization have had their ups and downs in both countries since that time. Clearly the general legitimation of mass citizenship, and the progress toward institutionalization of honest elections with high voter turnout, exhibited by Nicaragua, while very important, are not, in themselves, nearly enough to produce the full development and consolidation of democracy. Those accomplishments are necessary, they are not sufficient. Both Nicaragua and El Salvador remain incomplete democracies, "hybrid" regimes, in which different component aspects of democratization can proceed, stall, falter, regress, revive, accelerate at different and varying rates. For such ups and downs to continue, for successes to remain limited, partial, and inter-mixed with elements of failure, are essential characteristics of such seriously incomplete democracies.

It is not left/right polarization, and the missing center, that lies behind these ups and downs and the absence of steady democratizing progress. Polarization per se is not really the problem; or to put it differently, the problem with polarization is not the presence of left and right, and weakness at the center, per se. The problem rather is the manner in which the poles face and engage each other --

⁹² See [envio](#), June 1997, Vol 16, No 191.

the tendency toward intransigent partisan confrontation, the failure to engage opponent's arguments on their merits, to mount reasoned public deliberation, to negotiate creatively, to search assiduously for mutually tolerable compromise when some concerted government action is essential. This translates into a failure to develop the substance of public policy debate and the failure to model constructive political practice and deliberation for activists and the public. It also translates into a failure of substantive political learning: the failure of right and left to learn to transcend particular characteristic historical bad habits, in particular their traditional vanguardism and lack of realism -- instead adding to the old bad habits the new bad habits of U.S. style TV negative campaigning.

An adept and courageous center is needed, not so that it can make left and right disappear, but as a political actor that can encourage and mediate a more constructive form of political engagement. An adept center can help to bring each pole to greater realism and flexibility. But none of this necessarily means moving left and right away from principled ideological contestation and toward actual convergence with the center. Monopolistic or oligopolistic centrism can also discourage realism (as with the PRI in Mexico or AD and COPEI in Venezuela).

Thus, I agree that the weakness at the center is important in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and that the center has a key role to play in democratic consolidation. But this is not to say that left and right are likely to be, or should be, marginalized. The contrary view, favoring such marginalization, has been reinforced by the fall of actually-existing socialism and the end of the Cold War. In the wake of those events, a political system in which "far" right and (especially) "far" left remain prominent is regarded as unnaturally polarized. But such views slight the historical reality and significance of right and left. They also slight the importance to genuine democracy of mass, as opposed to middle class, citizenship -- mass citizenship that is more than "low intensity citizenship." And they don't really help us to understand the essential role of the political center in democratization.

In my view, historically, while a radical left has often been necessary to defeat "reactionary despotism" and open the way to democratization, the center-left has always played a key role in carrying countries beyond the hybrid status of incomplete democracy into relatively full and consolidated political democracy. What the full development of political democracy has almost always required is a center-left championing, depending upon, mobilizing mass citizenship and suffrage, and, in effect, mediating between right and left, such that right and left come to accept some centrist principles, in particular the principle of universal citizenship and the principle of an open public sphere. Such a center-left can only come to sufficient prominence to play such role effectively

on the basis of a historical defeat of the far right, a defeat of a sort that does not bring the far left to power.

Only as an independent center-left reemerges and debates with left, right, and center-right can a better understanding of political democracy begin to develop a substantial presence within the political culture, civil society, and public sphere in the new and radically incomplete democracies of Central America. But such developments are in danger of being overwhelmed by the "democracy industry." Democratic consolidation requires a kind of center-left that is professionalized in some ways but old-fashioned in others, operating within civil society and within electoral politics, fending off both the new bad habits of the "democracy industry" and the old bad habits of anti-democratic right and anti-democratic left.

Without the foregoing, elite pacts are likely to entail only formal and superficial versions of democratization, leaving the fullness and consolidation of democracy entirely open questions.

APPENDIX

	NICARAGUA			EL SALVADOR			
	<u>1984</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1997</u>
Total population	3.16	3.84	4.75	4.75	5.2	6	6.4
Voting Age Pop (VAP, in-country)	1.7	1.93	2.55	2.35	2.45	2.75	3.1
Registered	1.56	1.75	2.42	?	1.83	2.15	2.55
					2.2		complete 2.35 partial
% VAP registered	92	91	95	?	75	78	82
Total ballots	1.17	1.51	1.87+	1.52	1.00	1.45	1.18
Valid ballots	1.10	1.42	1.77+	1.4	0.94	1.35	1.13
% invalid	6.1	6.0	5.0	7.9	6.4	7.4	4.2
% registered voting	75	86.2	77.1+	?	54.7	67.6	46.3
% VAP voting	69	78	73+	65	41	53	38
% of total population voting	37	39	39+	32	19	24	18

Source: [Enciclopedia Electoral Latinoamericana y del Caribe](#), Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, 1993, supplemented by publications of the Supreme Electoral Council of Nicaragua and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador, by a variety of other sources, by interviews with United Nations officials, and by educated guess work. With the exception of the figures for registered voters (Nicaragua only), total ballots, and valid ballots, none of these sources report numbers identical to what I have settled on as best estimates (nor do they agree with each other). There is no fully reliable census data from either country. In El Salvador, the number of living registered voters resident in the country cannot be determined because the on-going voter registrar (the "padron") includes hundreds of thousands, perhaps half a million, dead people and people who have emigrated. Unless listed as a percentage, entries are in millions (rounded to two decimals). Plus signs refer to fact that upwards of 100,000 ballots from challenged precincts were not included in the final count because they could not be located for recounting.