

## The Society and Its Environment. In: El Salvador: A Country Study.

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### Abstract:

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Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

**Keywords:** El Salvador | country studies | government papers | cultural studies | society | environment | anthropology

### **Article:**

IN THE LATE 1980s, El Salvador was a country with major social, economic, and political problems that had reached crisis proportions on a national level. These problems reflected a basic pattern of social, economic, and political inequality that has persisted since the colonial era and grown in intensity during the twentieth century.

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America in land area; it is also the most densely populated. These conditions have combined with marked imbalances in income distribution to create sharp contrasts in standards of living and general quality of life between the powerful and wealthy elite and the poverty-stricken masses. Limited productive territory, continuing high rates of population growth, and restricted ownership of land have led to a high level of unemployment and underemployment among the still largely rural and agrarian population. This population has lost much of its subsistence land base and therefore has had to rely for survival on participation in the cash economy, to which, however, most of its members were distinctly marginal.

The socioeconomic plight of the rural population, largely ignored by military-dominated governments, contributed to the development of an armed insurgent movement by the early 1980s. Pressure for economic reforms also played a part in the dialogue over political change as El Salvador's rigidly controlled oligarchic system enforced by the military confronted pressures for a more open form of participatory democracy. Meanwhile, the turmoil and destruction caused by civil conflict exacerbated the problems of an already seriously stressed population.

## GEOGRAPHY

El Salvador, the smallest Spanish-speaking nation in the Western Hemisphere, is located on the western side of the Central American isthmus. With an area of 21,041 square kilometers, the country is only slightly larger than Massachusetts. It is roughly rectangular in shape with 515 kilometers of land boundaries and 307 kilometers of coastline on the Pacific Ocean. El Salvador is bounded by Guatemala to the west and Honduras to the north and east, and it is separated from Nicaragua on the southeast by the Golfo de Fonseca (see fig. 1; fig. 2).

### Physical Features

Two parallel mountain ranges cross El Salvador east to west with a central plateau between them and a narrow coastal plain hugging the Pacific (see fig. 3). These physical features divide the country into two physiographic regions. The mountain ranges and central plateau covering 85 percent of the land comprise the interior highlands. The remaining coastal plains are referred to as the Pacific lowlands.

The northern range of mountains, the Sierra Madre, forms a continuous chain along the border with Honduras. Elevations in this region range from 1,600 to 2,200 meters. The area was once heavily forested, but overexploitation led to extensive erosion, and it has become semibarren. As

a result, it is the country's most sparsely populated zone, with little farming or other development.

The southern range of mountains is actually a discontinuous chain of more than twenty volcanoes, clustered into five groups. The westernmost group, near the Guatemalan border, contains Izalco and Santa Ana, which at 2,365 meters is the highest point in El Salvador. Between the cones lie alluvial basins and rolling hills eroded from ash deposits. The volcanic soil is rich, and much of El Salvador's coffee is planted on these slopes.

The central plateau constitutes only 25 percent of the land area but contains the heaviest concentration of population and the country's largest cities. This plain is about 50 kilometers wide and has an average elevation of 600 meters. Terrain here is rolling, with occasional escarpments, lava fields, and geysers.

A narrow plain extends from the coastal volcanic range to the Pacific Ocean. This region has a width ranging from one to thirty-two kilometers with the widest section in the east, adjacent to the Golfo de Fonseca. Near La Libertad, however, the mountains pinch the lowlands out; the slopes of adjacent volcanoes come down directly to the sea. Surfaces in the Pacific lowlands are generally flat or gently rolling and result from alluvial deposits from nearby slopes.

El Salvador has over 300 rivers, the most important of which is the Rio Lempa. Originating in Guatemala, the Rio Lempa cuts across the northern range of mountains, flows along much of the central plateau, and finally cuts through the southern volcanic range to empty into the Pacific. It is El Salvador's only navigable river, and it and its tributaries drain about half the country. Other rivers are generally short and drain the Pacific lowlands or flow from the central plateau through gaps in the southern mountain range to the Pacific.

Numerous lakes of volcanic origin are found in the interior highlands; many of these lakes are surrounded by mountains and have high, steep banks. The largest lake, the Lago de Ilopango, lies just to the east of the capital. Other large lakes include the Lago de Coatepeque in the west and the Lago de Güija on the Guatemalan border. The Cerron Grande Dam on the Rio Lempa has created a large reservoir, the Embalse Cerron Grande, in northern El Salvador.

## Climate

El Salvador has a tropical climate with pronounced wet and dry seasons. Temperatures vary primarily with elevation and show little seasonal change. The Pacific lowlands are uniformly hot; the central plateau and mountain areas are more moderate.

The rainy season, known locally as *invierno*, or winter, extends from May to October. Almost all the annual rainfall occurs during this time, and yearly totals, particularly on southern-facing mountain slopes, can be as high as 200 centimeters. Protected areas and the central plateau receive lesser, although still significant, amounts. Rainfall during this season generally comes from low pressure over the Pacific and usually falls in heavy afternoon thunderstorms. Although hurricanes occasionally form in the Pacific, they seldom affect El Salvador.

From November through April, the northeast trade winds control weather patterns. During these months, air flowing from the Caribbean has had most of the precipitation wrung out of it passing over the mountains in Honduras. By the time this air reaches El Salvador, it is dry, hot, and hazy. This season is known locally as *verano*, or summer.

Temperatures vary little with season; elevation is the primary determinant. The Pacific lowlands are the hottest region, with annual averages ranging from 25°C to 29°C. San Salvador is representative of the central plateau, with an annual average temperature of 23°C and absolute high and low readings of 38°C and 7°C, respectively. Mountain areas are the coolest, with annual averages from 12°C to 23°C and minimum temperatures sometimes approaching freezing.

## POPULATION

Although historically El Salvador has been home to a culturally diverse mix of peoples including blacks, Indians, Hispanics, and North Europeans, by the 1980s the population of the country was essentially homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and basic cultural identity. Virtually all Salvadorans spoke Spanish, the official language, as their mother tongue, and the vast majority

could be characterized as mestizos (or ladinos, a term more commonly used in Central America), meaning persons of mixed biological ancestry who follow a wide variety of indigenous and Hispanic customs and habits that over the centuries have come to constitute Spanish-American cultural patterns. In the late 1980s, the ethnic composition of the population was estimated as 89 percent mestizo, 10 percent Indian, and 1 percent white.

In contrast to most other Central American countries, El Salvador no longer possessed an ethnically or linguistically distinct Indian population, although persons of Indian racial or cultural heritage still lived in the western departments of the country (see Indians , this ch.). During the twentieth century, this population was rapidly assimilated into the dominant Hispanic culture. Similarly, there was no ethnically or culturally distinct black population.

In spite of ethnic homogeneity, however, Salvadoran society in the 1980s exhibited strong contrasts in life-style based on extremes of great wealth and abject poverty. These contrasting life-styles, in turn, created serious rifts in Salvadoran society that effectively divided the population into distinctive subcultural groups.

#### Demographic Trends

The population of El Salvador at the time of the national census in 1971 was 3,549,000. According to estimates, population growth averaged 3.4 percent annually in the 1970s and 2.4 percent in the 1980s. One United States government estimate claimed a 1988 population figure of 5,389,000 (estimates vary). Although El Salvador's high rate of population growth was similar to that of other Central American countries, the social and political effects of this population increase were aggravated by the very limited national territory available for the population.

Consequently, El Salvador also consistently had very high population density. From a figure of 170 persons per square kilometer in 1970, density has been projected to rise to about 230 persons per square kilometer in 1980 and to an extremely high 420 persons by 2000. El Salvador is the most crowded country of Central America (indeed, of all Latin America), and that condition will continue into the foreseeable future. This demographic situation has further exacerbated the problems associated with the inequality of national resource distribution. But the consequences of these demographic pressures have not been limited to El Salvador. Historically, high Salvadoran population density has contributed to tensions with neighboring Honduras, as land-poor Salvadorans emigrated to less densely populated Honduras and established themselves as

squatters on unused or underused land. This phenomenon was a major cause of the 1969 war between El Salvador and Honduras (see *The 1969 War with Honduras* , ch. 1).

The distribution of population in El Salvador also remained uneven. The least densely populated areas were the northern departments of Chalatenango, Morazan, and Cabanas, encompassing the marginal land and rugged terrain of the descending slopes of mountain ranges that peak in Honduras (see *Physical Features* , this ch.). In contrast, the areas of greatest settlement were in the fertile central zone, where there was a large rural population, and in the major urban areas, including the San Salvador metropolitan area (which had 828 persons per square kilometer in 1971), Santa Ana, and San Miguel.

The department of San Salvador was the most populous of El Salvador's fourteen departments, with a population density in the mid-1970s of 825 persons per square kilometer. The second most densely populated department at that time was neighboring Cuscatlan, with 206 persons per square kilometer. All other departments had less than 200 persons per square kilometer.

Observers believed that significant population growth would continue in the capital, San Salvador, where the net increase in population for the decade of the 1960s (202,000 persons) and of the 1970s (327,000) almost equaled and exceeded, respectively, the city's total population in 1950 (213,000). The population of San Salvador in 1980 was estimated to be 858,000, a figure that represented 30 percent of the total national population. The capital accounted for approximately 60 percent of the total urban population during 1950-80; its growth rates ranged between 4.4 percent and 5 percent during that period. Projections placed the population of the capital at approximately 1 million by 1990 and 1.5 million by the end of the century.

The number of small urban centers under 50,000 inhabitants in El Salvador increased from five in 1950 to eighteen by 1980. Inhabitants of these centers comprised 24 percent of the total urban population in 1980. San Miguel and Santa Ana, the two secondary cities of the country, accounted for an estimated 15 percent of the total urban population in 1980 and had an estimated annual growth rate of 3 percent (Santa Ana) and 4 percent (San Miguel) for the decades between 1950 and 1980. Nevertheless, these two cities were unable to compete with San Salvador in growth and prosperity. San Salvador's urbanized area was 5.7 times as large as that of Santa Ana, the next largest city, by the mid-1970s.

The urban population has grown approximately 50 percent in each decade from 1950 to 1980 and was projected to increase 3.9 percent annually from 1971 to 2000, as compared with an approximate rural population increase of only 30 percent per decade and a projected annual rate of increase of 2.8 percent from 1971 to 2000. But the rural population has been and will continue to be significantly larger than the urban in absolute numbers. The net rural population in 1971 was over 2.6 million, but it was projected to reach an estimated 6 million persons by the end of the century.

This high rural population growth rate accounted for the relatively low share, only 30 percent, of the total national population found in the capital in 1980. In addition, relatively few "new cities," towns increasing from under to over 10,000 inhabitants, appeared in the three decades prior to 1980. Urban growth therefore was limited primarily to increases in existing cities. During the 1950-80 period, urban areas accounted for 35 to 40 percent of the national population increase; analysts projected, however, that between 1980 and 2000 the urban sector as a whole would probably have to absorb 48 to 57 percent of that increase. San Salvador was expected to receive the bulk of urban population growth, perhaps as much as 65 to 69 percent from 1980 to 2000, while the two secondary cities and the smaller urban centers would decline somewhat in percentage of total urban population.

#### Population Growth and Age Distribution

Source: Based on information from Robert W. Fox and Jerrold W. Huguet, *Population and Urban Trends in Central America and Panama*, Washington, 1977, 103-4.

The population of El Salvador increased from 1.9 million inhabitants in 1950 to 4.1 million in 1975 and 4.7 million in 1984. It was projected to increase to 8.8 million by the year 2000. In other words, the population would have doubled in each quarter-century since 1950. This high growth rate was a result of three main factors characteristic not only of El Salvador but also of Central America as a whole: a rapidly falling death rate, a continued high birth rate, and a very young population, i.e., a high proportion of the national population under age twenty (see fig. 4).

Although there was some variance in figures between El Salvador's census reports and estimates by the United Nations Latin American Center for Demography (Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía--CELADE), there was agreement on basic birth and death statistics. The crude birth rate (the annual number of births per 1,000 inhabitants) declined from a relatively high rate of 49 through the 1950s to 44.4 in the late 1960s. In the major industrial nations the rate is commonly

below 20. The annual death rate per 1,000 inhabitants, however, declined by approximately one-third during the same period, falling from 21.3 to 13, and this decline contributed to the high rate of national population increase.

From 1970 to 2000, a continuing decline in both birth rates and death rates was anticipated. Studies projected a gradual fall in the crude birth rate from 42.2 in 1970-75 to 33.5 in 1995-2000 and in the crude death rate from 11.1 in 1970-75 to 7.2 in 1985- 90 and 5.6 in 1995-2000 (see table 2, Appendix). These two trends would operate more or less in tandem, however, so that the rate of natural increase, though declining, would still hover at around 3 percent. The overall population was very young; the median age in the country declined from nineteen in 1950 to seventeen in 1975, and 41.3 percent were projected to be under age fifteen by the year 2000. It is noteworthy here that life expectancy at birth improved from approximately forty-six years in the 1950s to fifty-nine years in 1977 and to sixty-five years in 1984 (sixty-three years for males and sixty-six for females), largely as a result of mass immunization schemes and control of disease-bearing insects. Life expectancy was expected to reach sixty-nine to seventy years in 1995-2000.

Birth rates showed that total fertility rates (the number of children a woman would bear in her lifetime if she experienced average fertility) ranged from approximately 6.1 to 6.3 in the mid-1970s, down from 6.7 in 1961. Analysts projected that this rate would drop to 4.4 in 1995-2000. The decrease in the level of fertility since 1961 was seen in the twenty-to thirty-nine-year-old age-group.

Family planning programs of both the privately organized Salvadoran Demographic Association, which was founded in 1962 and began operations in 1967, and (after 1971) government agencies under the Ministry of Public Health and Social Services probably contributed to this decline in fertility rates. The groups lobbied for family planning programs, provided family planning clinics, and dispensed birth control information and devices. Female sterilization was the most common birth control method because it is final and does not require frequent checkups or visits to clinics for additional supplies. The need for clinic visits has associated use of oral contraceptives in the popular mind with illness. In addition, there were fewer religious objections to sterilization. At the same time, abortions also were widely practiced. Abortion was illegal in El Salvador, and improperly performed abortions were common. They were the third leading cause of hospital admissions in 1975, constituting 24 of every 1,000 admissions, according to a sample survey.

Fertility rates showed significant contrasts between urban and rural settings. In 1975 the birth rate per 1,000 women in rural areas was estimated at 46 to 47, whereas in urban areas it stood at approximately 34 to 35 (31 to 33 for the San Salvador metropolitan area). On average, by age thirty-five, rural women had seven children while urban women had only five. By the end of their childbearing years, rural women, on average, had eight children, and urban women had six. Given the markedly inferior health conditions of the countryside, however, of the two additional children born to rural women, only one would survive. The number of children under age one per 1,000 women between ages fifteen and forty-four declined by 16.5 percent in urban areas from 1961 to 1971, while it remained essentially unchanged over that same time period in rural areas.

Disparate fertility rates underscored the point that El Salvador continued to be a rural country in the late 1980s, "rural" in this context including all population in towns of less than 20,000. In fact, El Salvador showed the highest rural population increase--82 percent from 1961 to 1980--in Latin America.

## THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

In the late 1980s, El Salvador was experiencing severe internal stress as a result of an ongoing insurgency, a severely debilitated economy, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. Despite reform efforts begun under the post-1979 civilianmilitary junta governments, the country's longstanding division between rich and poor still represented a challenge to Salvadoran leaders and to the society as a whole.

The sharp contrast between those with great wealth and those living in extreme poverty had characterized Salvadoran society for more than a century and had roots in its colonial past (see *Spanish Conquest and Colonization*, ch. 1). When El Salvador became an independent republic in the early nineteenth century, this pattern did not change. Wealthy landowners, members of only a very few families, organized the national government to secure their positions and continued to dominate Salvadoran national life. Rural peasants and workers provided for their own subsistence needs and labored for the elite. Indeed, as the century progressed, this pattern was sharpened by the successful introduction of coffee as an export cash crop. As the landed elite, along with more recently arrived European banking and financial families interested in coffee, began to realize the wealth potential of this crop, they increased the size of their estates.

They did so by absorbing into their private holdings public lands (forests) and the communal lands of *municipios* (the Salvadoran equivalent of counties) and Indian communities, lands

formerly cultivated in small subsistence plots by mestizo and Indian peasants. The government officially decreed these common lands out of existence in favor of private property ownership in 1881. Those dispossessed of their subsistence lands became permanent or seasonal laborers working for extremely low wages on coffee estates, which were labor-intensive enterprises. To protect their lands and their prosperity, the coffee elite formed a strong economic and political oligarchy. The army and the National Guard (Guardia Nacional--GN) were employed to control the unrest and occasional open rebellions among the many now landless and poorly paid laborers.

When coffee prices fell during the Great Depression of the 1930s, laborers' wages were reduced still further, and since much subsistence land had been converted to private coffee cultivation and the production of staple crops had declined accordingly, living conditions worsened (see *Economic Crisis and Repression* , ch. 1). Unemployment rose too, as many coffee growers decided not to harvest their crops. In addition, many small landowners, unable to survive the low coffee prices, lost their lands to those who were wealthier, and landownership became even more concentrated.

In the decades following the depression, export agriculture became somewhat diversified as cotton and, to a lesser extent, sugar also became important plantation cash crops, and some of the elite began to argue for industrial development. The upper class in general, however, strongly resisted any significant changes in the basic social, economic, and political order. After a rural uprising in 1932 and the brutal reprisals later referred to as *la matanza* (the massacre), in which about 30,000 were killed by troops, the dominance of the elite was preserved and defended by the Salvadoran military (see *Economic Crisis and Repression* , ch. 1).

### The Upper Sector

In relation to the total population, the Salvadoran elite was very small; by the early 1980s it constituted approximately 2 percent of the population. This social sector, however, owned 60 percent of the nation's productive land, exercised direct or indirect control over all key productive sectors of the economy, and accounted for one-third of the national income.

The economic interests of the elite fell into three general categories: export-oriented agribusiness, including coffee, cotton, sugar, and cattle; commercial and financial enterprises, including insurance, financial investment, real estate, utilities, and banks; and relatively newer retail and industrial interests, including distributorships and manufacturing. Given the continued

dominance of export agriculture and of financial interests in the 1980s, this third category remained less significant overall.

Among the elite, there were divisions based on relative social status and prestige as determined by ancestry. The oldest and most prestigious families were those associated with the colonial "founding fathers" who had developed export agriculture. Next in the pecking order were the families, mainly involved in banking and finance, whose European ancestors had immigrated to El Salvador in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a useful knowledge of foreign markets. The newest elite families, on the lowest social rung of the upper echelon, included Lebanese, Palestinians, and Jews and were pejoratively referred to as "Turcos" by the "older" elites. These most recent immigrants constituted the bulk of the Salvadoran merchant class; they tended to socialize primarily within their own group.

Despite these social distinctions, the Salvadoran elite as a whole was interconnected through bonds of shared economic interest, direct business dealings, particularly between the agribusiness and financial sectors, and frequent intermarriage. The families of the oligarchy generally intermarried. Daughters anticipated lives as pampered mothers and wives, while sons expected a place in one of the family businesses. Generally, members of elite families tended to live in San Salvador, whence they traveled periodically to their plantations, which were usually directed on site by resident administrators, or to Western Europe or the United States for business or recreation. The elite educated their children in private schools and in United States universities, entertained at fashionable clubs, and enjoyed extravagant conspicuous consumption.

To reconcile their differences and represent their interests, the elite organized into associations. Most notable among these associations was the National Association of Private Enterprise (Asociacion Nacional de la Empresa Privada--ANEP), which has expressed oligarchy views through various declarations in the media and before the government (see Political Dynamics , ch. 4).

The economic oligarchy, although traditionally the most influential sector of Salvadoran society, was not the most powerful in and of itself. The Salvadoran upper sector also included the officer ranks of the military. Active or retired military personnel headed the government from 1932 to 1982, and, as a result, ambitious individual military officers and officer factions also emerged as interest groups in their own right. Members of the military gradually became involved in the elite economic structure--managing and directing banks, the social security institute, the national

airline, and the census bureau, as well as owning large estates and becoming involved in export agriculture. This combination of the officer corps and the elite families constituted the most powerful political and economic force in the country.

Although their interests became closely interwoven, the economic oligarchy and the military remained separate entities. A few select military personnel were adopted into the oligarchy after their retirement, but few in the military were welcomed into the more exclusive San Salvador clubs frequented by the elite. For its own part, the officer corps was a closed and cliquish group; 90 percent of its members were graduates of the Captain General Gerardo Barrios Military Academy (Escuela Militar Capitan General Gerardo Barrios) and organized in mutually supportive networks based on graduating class membership. Each graduating class formed a group known as a *tanda*, whose members assisted each other and entered alliances with other *tandas* to broker the allocation of command and staff positions within the armed forces (see *Officer Corps Dynamics*, ch. 5). The military served as one of the few mechanisms of upward mobility in Salvadoran society. The expectation of power and prestige was a considerable motivator for cadets, most of whom typically came from a Salvadoran middle-class background.

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The Lower Sector

Unavailable

Village women in Santa Inés, San Miguel Department

Courtesy Inter-American Development Bank

The vast majority of Salvadorans were members of the lower sector of the population, which was composed of full- or parttime laborers, peasant smallholders, and the unemployed. Although there was considerable diversity within this large social sector, most of its members shared the common denominators of dependence on the cash economy and insufficient earning power for even a minimally adequate standard of living. The variation within this population reflected degrees of landlessness, types of employment, residence locations, and relationship with economic and military power holders.

In 1981 approximately 58 percent of Salvadorans lived in rural areas, some as full-time estate workers (*colonos*), others owning or more likely renting (*arrendatarios*) small plots of marginal land, and many, both those with small plots of land and the vast number who were landless, as seasonal wage laborers or unemployed. During the 1980s, the number of workers depending on agriculture for jobs increased, as a result of both population growth in the rural areas and the civil conflict, which eliminated more nonagricultural than agricultural jobs.

The extent of access to marginal subsistence plots varied according to the degree of plantation development in the various regions of El Salvador. The hilly northern departments of Chalatenango, Cabanas, and Morazan, adjacent to the Honduran border, contained relatively few

large estates. Consequently, subsistence farms continued to exist there. But such farms, being small and with marginal soil quality, generally did not provide full self-sufficiency or year-round employment. Nor was much cash available from the sale of produce, for the government, concerned with providing affordable food for city dwellers, kept food prices low. Consequently, members of these peasant families migrated seasonally to cash crop (coffee) estates at harvest time, when they obtained temporary jobs at very low wages, or moved to San Salvador.

Peasants living in areas where coffee, cotton, and sugarcane were grown extensively were less likely to have access to subsistence plots, although valiant attempts were made to cultivate the rocky, marginal land on the steep hillsides of the volcanic ranges of central El Salvador, where coffee estates absorbed all good land in the central valleys and on the cultivable slopes. The development of cotton estates on the lowlying coastal plain and of sugarcane, grown between the coastal cotton and hilly coffee regions, also dislocated many peasants. In addition, large-scale mechanization in the 1970s eliminated the need for sizable labor forces on these estates. For example, one 6,000-hectare cotton estate employed a total regular work force of only thirty-five people. The development of grazing lands for export cattle on the coastal plain and in some interior valleys again reduced available subsistence land while requiring very few laborers. In the 1970s, more of El Salvador's land resources were used for cattle grazing than for production of food crops.

In addition, as social unrest grew among rural laborers, large estate owners preferred wherever possible to increase the use of seasonal rather than permanent workers. In the cottongrowing areas, for example, the number of colonos decreased by 60 to 95 percent during the 1960s. Overall, the number of landholdings with colono arrangements dropped from a high of 55,000 in 1961 to 17,000 in 1971. Permanent agricultural workers were thought to be more susceptible than temporary workers to political organization and therefore were believed to constitute more of a potential threat to elite land rights. This attitude further increased the number of underemployed and unemployed landless laborers in the countryside. A few statistics illustrate the situation in general. In 1961, about 12 percent of the rural population was landless; by 1971 the figure had reached 29 percent; in 1975 the number of landless was estimated at 41 percent. Similarly, from 1950 to 1970 rural unemployment stood at 45 to 50 percent. By 1975 only 37 percent of rural workers worked full time, 14 percent worked an average of nine months, 19 percent worked an average of six months, and a full 30 percent worked for only two to three months annually. By 1980 an estimated 65 percent of the rural population was landless and dependent on wage employment.

The small percentage of the labor force employed in industry was somewhat better off than agricultural workers, but only about 12.8 percent of the labor force was employed in industry in 1961, and by 1971 that number had dropped to 9.8 percent (see Industry , ch. 3). Their low numbers in part reflected the use of capitalintensive technology, which made it unnecessary to hire a large work force. Jobs also were few because industry in general, and manufacturing in particular, remained limited as a result of capital flight caused by political instability, the unsettled economy, and damaging guerrilla attacks.

Enlisted military personnel, another component of the lower sector, were young peasant conscripts or volunteers who had joined the armed forces to enjoy three meals a day and a warm place to sleep; some of the conscripts had been impressed into service in response to manpower shortages. After discharge from active duty, some ex-servicemen signed on for further service and benefits as military reservists in the GN or in civil defense groups.

### The Middle Sector

The small proportion of society constituting a middle class-- about 8 percent in the early 1980s-- included skilled workers, government employees, professionals, school teachers, smallholders, small businessmen, and commercial employees. These people were caught between the polar extremes of wealth and poverty. Not being members of the traditional oligarchy--although the great success of nineteenth- century coffee production had stimulated the development of the middle sector as well as of the elite--the middle sector traditionally had little direct influence in government affairs. Similarly, although profoundly influenced by the United States, members of this population sector did not have sufficient wealth to enjoy ready access to schooling or travel in that country. Instead, having only a tenuous toehold on property and limited power within the existing Salvadoran system, the middle sector found its position precarious and felt seriously threatened by El Salvador's political and economic crises.

After the depression of the 1930s, the middle sector hoped to improve the standard of living for all Salvadorans through agrarian reform and through legalized peasant organizing. In the 1960s and early 1970s, various professionals and other members of the middle class tried to promote meaningful elections and called for a transition to more open and participatory democratic procedures. As economic and political crises deepened in the 1970s and 1980s, however, many members of the middle class became alienated by the rising tide of political violence. Many of these Salvadorans wished that the problem of "subversives" would simply go away so that order, stability, and economic growth could be restored. Others, however, chose to become increasingly active in political parties or popular organizations.

## Indians

In contrast to most other Central American countries, El Salvador in the late 1980s did not contain an ethnically distinct Indian population. Native communities of Pipil and also Lenca, located mainly in the western departments, constituted perhaps 60 percent of the population throughout the colonial era and into the early decades of independence. But the development of coffee estates saw the dissolution of the communal lands of native villages and the slow but continual incorporation of Indians into the general cash economy, where they became peasants and wage laborers. By the late nineteenth century, this assimilation process was essentially complete. The 1930 census, the last census containing the category of "Indian," designated only 5.6 percent of the population, or some 80,000 persons, as Indian, although it is not clear what criteria were used in this determination. Other, possibly more accurate, independent estimates, however, placed the mid-twentieth-century Indian population at 20 percent, or close to 400,000 persons. The criteria used in these estimates to identify individuals as Indian included religious activities, distinctive women's dress, language, and involvement in various handicrafts. Still, the life-style of the majority of these people was no longer completely Indian. Most were ladinoized, Hispanic acculturated, monolingual Spanish speakers who did not wear distinctive Indian dress. The remaining Indian population was found primarily in southwestern El Salvador.

The abandonment of Indian language and customs was hastened by political repression after an abortive peasant/Indian uprising in 1932. The revolt centered in the western part of the country, around the former Indian towns of Ahuachapan, Santa Ana, and Sonsonate, where the growth of coffee estates since the late nineteenth century had absorbed subsistence lands of Indians and mestizos alike. The revolt was supported by a number of Indian community leaders (*caciques*). Even though most Indian communal lands had been lost, traditional community-centered religious-political organizations (*cofradías*) and their leaders remained sufficiently influential to organize and direct popular unrest. The harsh and bloody reprisal (*la matanza*) by government forces that ensued fell on the entire population of the region whether they had been combatants or not, and most had not. Perhaps as many as 30,000 were killed, including many who were culturally designated as Indian or who were deemed by government forces to have an Indian-like physical appearance. In the face of such racially motivated repression, most natives stopped wearing traditional dress, abandoned the Pipil language, and adopted ladino customs. In 1975 it was estimated that no more than 1 percent of the population wore distinctive Indian clothing or followed Indian customs.

Even though visible signs of ethnic identity were all but lost, many persons retained an interest in Salvadoran Indian heritage and worked to preserve it as best they could. During the 1970s, the

Central American University Jose Simeon Canas (Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Canas--UCA) in San Salvador began a systematic study of the surviving elements of the Pipil language; researchers found that about one-tenth of households in Sonsonate, Ahuachapan, and La Libertad contained at least one Pipil speaker. Various aspects of Indian tradition, including dance ceremonies that had been held in private for thirty years, were also rediscovered. As political tensions grew in the 1980s, however, access to Indian households became more difficult, and the Pipil language study was stopped.

In short, although observers have estimated that much of the Salvadoran population in the 1980s could be said to possess an Indian racial background, culturally there was no significant Indian ethnic sector in the country. Nonetheless, the concept of Indian ethnicity was still a rallying point. In the mid-1980s, thousands of persons nationwide supported a popular organization known as the National Association of Salvadoran Indians (Asociacion Nacional Indigena Salvadorena--ANIS) headquartered in Sonsonate.

## RURAL LIFE

As indicated, El Salvador remained a largely rural country despite the growth of San Salvador and its environs. For the vast majority of rural residents, however, land shortages, unemployment and underemployment, and extremely low wages combined to keep the standard of living low and the quality of life barely tolerable.

### Standard of Living

In this largely agrarian society, land distribution continued to lie at the heart of the many problems afflicting the poor. In 1971, which as of 1988 was the date of the latest census, 92 percent of farms, some 250,500 in number, covered less than ten hectares each and together constituted only 27 percent of total farm area. These farms were the holdings of peasant laborers who planted basic foodstuffs such as corn, beans, rice, and sorghum on 95 percent of their holdings. They used rotational methods of agriculture in which individual plots were cultivated for about two years, then left fallow while another plot was tilled.

The 8 percent of the farms with an area greater than ten hectares occupied the remaining 73 percent of farm area. Within this category, 1,941 farms between 100 and 500 hectares in size, representing 0.8 percent of the total number of farms, accounted for 38.7 percent of all land

under cultivation. Less than 20 percent of this land produced basic grains. Farms of more than 500 hectares accounted for more than 15 percent of the cultivated land. These farms included the agricultural estates of the elite. The data actually understated the extent of land concentration within the upper sector, however, since some elite individuals owned more than one farm and some large farms were registered in the names of various family members in an effort to conceal family holdings.

At the other end of the scale, there was a considerable increase during the 1970s in the number of farms composed of less than one hectare of land. These farms were on very poor soil, often on steep hillsides prone to erosion, and frequently were rented rather than owned. Such small rental farms were particularly common in the hilly northern departments of Chalatenango, Cuscatlan, Morazan, and Cabanas. In 1950 there were 70,400 such farms; in 1961 there were 107,000; in 1971 there were 132,000; and in 1975 there were 138,800. Stated somewhat differently, in 1975 an estimated 96.3 percent of the rural population had access to five hectares or less of generally marginal quality land per family; approximately seven hectares were judged necessary for a "typical" family of six people to produce enough food and income for its needs.

Wage labor was the alternative to agricultural selfsufficiency for the majority of rural Salvadorans. In fact, by 1980 approximately 65 percent of the rural work force was landless and dependent on temporary or full-time wage labor; more than half the rural families depended on wage work for over half their income. Given the lack of permanent jobs in the agricultural sector, the low wage scale, and the number of laborers seeking work, however, cash income was insufficient for many peasant laborers in the countryside. In 1975, for example, a typical family of six was estimated to need US\$533 in annual income to buy the basic food needed to survive, yet 60 percent earned US\$120 or less.

The effect of a declining national economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as evidenced by a decline in agricultural production of 7.4 percent in 1982 and 8.7 percent in 1983, restricted the number of available jobs (see *The Labor Force*, ch. 3). Unemployment and underemployment increased markedly during the late 1970s and early 1980s and reached such serious proportions that by 1986, according to Salvadoran government statistics, 30 percent of the work force was unemployed and another 20 percent was underemployed (unofficial sources claimed even higher figures). Of those working, a reported 80 percent worked only part time, often at jobs lasting only a few days, or received less than the minimum wage. Regular day labor on a cotton or sugar estate sometimes provided the equivalent of US\$1.75 per day or less; seasonal jobs at harvest sometimes paid as little as US\$0.60 a day.

In addition, even as the number of workers receiving less than the minimum wage increased, the buying power of that wage declined by 65 percent from 1979 to 1983, further aggravating the already serious economic problems of the poor. The minimum diet was very sparse, consisting of maize, beans, rice, sorghum, and, for a family of six, less than one kilogram of meat per month and a per capita caloric intake that was the lowest in the Western Hemisphere. Consumption levels in general fell by 27 percent between 1979 and 1981 and by a further 20 percent by 1984; the overall cost of living rose 98 percent during the 1979-84 period. Clothing and foodstuffs-- items on which some 63 percent of all Salvadoran families spent 62 to 65 percent of their income--rose by 153 and 122 percent, respectively.

Poverty encouraged the additional hardship of broken families, a particularly acute problem among landless laborers who often had to move to find work. By 1980 about 25 percent of households were headed by women, partially as a result of men leaving the family unit in search of work. That over 60 percent of children were born out of wedlock was another indication of familial instability.

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The 8 percent of the farms with an area greater than ten hectares occupied the remaining 73 percent of farm area. Within this category, 1,941 farms between 100 and 500 hectares in size, representing 0.8 percent of the total number of farms, accounted for 38.7 percent of all land under cultivation. Less than 20 percent of this land produced basic grains. Farms of more than 500 hectares accounted for more than 15 percent of the cultivated land. These farms included the agricultural estates of the elite. The data actually understated the extent of land concentration within the upper sector, however, since some elite individuals owned more than one farm and some large farms were registered in the names of various family members in an effort to conceal family holdings.

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#### Health and Welfare

Insufficient income had a serious adverse effect on the general health and vitality of the rural population. In the mid-1980s, El Salvador was among the countries of the Western Hemisphere most seriously affected by malnutrition. During the 1970s, the poorer 50 percent of the population consumed, on average, only 63 percent of required calories and 56 percent of required protein according to accepted international guidelines for adequate nutrition; the overall population averaged 77.2 percent of the minimum standard for caloric consumption and 83.6 percent of the standard for protein consumption. Anemia, riboflavin deficiencies, and vitamin A and other vitamin deficiencies were widespread among the population.

Malnutrition was particularly prevalent among young children. Even before the upset caused by civil conflict during the 1980s, approximately 48.5 percent of children under five years of age suffered from mild malnutrition, 22.9 percent from moderate malnutrition requiring medical attention to cure, and 3.1 percent from severe malnutrition requiring hospitalization for adequate recovery. Stated differently, 80 percent of children suffered from at least first-degree malnutrition--10 to 24 percent underweight--and 5 percent suffered from third-degree

malnutrition--over 40 percent underweight. Because pregnant women usually lacked proper nutrition as well, many children were born underweight and undernourished.

The poverty responsible for inadequate nourishment among campesinos was also reflected in substandard homes and living conditions. In some regions, land for housing and domestic life was limited to an absolute minimum by the expansion of private estates. Some closely crowded groups of huts were strung along the remaining narrow strips of public lands bordering highways and rivers or erected on narrow peripheries between the fenced boundaries of estates closed to resident laborers and the nearest public road, in an arrangement called "fence housing."

Rural homes typically sheltered four or more persons. They usually had one, sometimes two, rooms, dirt floors, walls of adobe brick or bahareque (wood frame with a mud or rubble fill) or of poles and straw, and thatched or tiled roofs. The kitchen commonly was in a separate shelter or located under an extension of the main roof. Even in the 1980s, almost none of the rural population had access to sewage systems. Some 12 percent had latrines or septic tanks, but 80 percent had no sanitation facilities. Surface water was seriously polluted by agriculture and industry, yet 60 percent of the rural population depended on rivers and streams and/or rainwater and 22 percent on wells for their water needs. Some 93 percent were without electricity and used kerosene lamps or candles for light and wood or charcoal for cooking and heat.

Conditions such as these, combined with malnutrition, produced high rates of chronic illness and high mortality, especially in infants and young children. Although families of three to four children were considered the most desirable size, rural women actually had an average of six to eight children and, given the high infant death rate (about 120 to 125 per 1,000 live births) often had twice as many pregnancies. In general, about 30 percent of all deaths per year were of children under the age of one, and with another 14 percent occurred in the age-group from one to four.

Several diseases posed particularly serious problems. Malaria was of major concern in rural departments, with morbidity ranges between 4,100 and 1,800 per 100,000 inhabitants in the 1980s. Water-borne diseases were also particularly common and one of the major factors affecting mortality. In the 1970s and 1980s, the leading causes of death included enteritis and other diarrheal diseases, as well as pneumonia and other respiratory diseases, such as bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma. Nutritional insufficiencies, perinatal complications, infections, and parasitic diseases also took a high toll, especially among children (see table 3, Appendix). As of

1987, El Salvador had reported sixteen cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), the lowest total of any Central American country except Belize. Of the sixteen, six victims had died.

High mortality rates reflected the fact that health care itself was limited and medical facilities for the general population inadequate. This condition was aggravated by the civil disturbances of the 1980s. The 1971 census indicated that there were three doctors and seventeen hospital beds for every 10,000 persons. In 1984 ten general hospitals and twelve health centers, in addition to several hundred other community posts and dispensaries, provided between 0.5 and 1.5 beds per 1,000 inhabitants outside the San Salvador metropolitan area. Some rural regions did not have any hospital facilities. Where rural hospitals existed, health care personnel frequently were hampered in their work by limited equipment and supplies and unsanitary conditions. These conditions made it difficult to meet even the ordinary medical needs of the rural population. For example, most births took place at home, sometimes with the assistance of relatives or neighbors, but often unassisted.

Rural areas were deprived of sufficient government-financed social programs in part because of a longstanding governmental preference to keep taxes low and to concentrate the provision of services in San Salvador. The situation was exacerbated by increased military spending during the 1980s, as the budget allocations for the Ministry of Public Health and Social Services declined in real terms. Similarly, the number of medical personnel available to work in rural areas declined drastically after the Medical School of the National University was closed in 1980, ending the flow of interns, who had provided much of the medical care in the countryside. In addition, many doctors and other health workers in rural areas either relocated or abandoned their efforts as a result of the intensifying civil conflict in the 1980s.

The government, particularly through the Ministry of Public Health and Social Services, recognized as national priorities the need for improvement of health services, control of malaria, improved sanitation and drinking water quality, and increased child survival. It pledged to follow various lines of action toward these ends.

Social security was another government benefit to which rural Salvadorans had far less access than urban dwellers. The social security system was administered by the Salvadoran Social Security Institute, an autonomous institution first established in 1949. Its medical benefits and pension system, implemented in 1969, covered employees in industry and commerce but

excluded agricultural workers, domestics, casual employees, and civil servants. The latter were covered by a different system. The institute also administered a number of hospitals throughout the country. Individuals (and their spouses) covered by the system were entitled to sickness and maternity benefits, care for workrelated injuries, and pensions on the basis of old age or disability. The system was funded by payroll deductions from the insured, as well as by employer and government contributions.

## Education

Public education was a higher priority than health care for government spending, and statistics reflected this disparity. School attendance and literacy in general increased notably in El Salvador as a whole during the twentieth century, particularly during the 1960s, when an ambitious program of school construction was carried out. Officially, literacy increased from 26.2 percent of the adult population in 1930 to 59.7 percent in 1971. By 1980 only 31 percent of the population aged ten years or older was considered illiterate.

The Salvadoran education system included one year of preschool, nine years of basic education, three years of secondary education, and higher education at two universities and several specialized postsecondary institutions. The curriculum at the basic and secondary levels, developed by the Ministry of Education, was uniform throughout the country. The provision of education, however, suffered from a rural-urban dichotomy. Countrywide statistics displayed the weakness of the school system on the secondary level; in a 1976 study, only 34 percent of students reached grade nine, and 15 percent reached grade twelve.

In the 1970s, primary-school enrollment increased by 90 percent. The benefit of such schooling, however, disproportionately favored urban areas, especially San Salvador, even though the majority of the illiterate population lived in rural areas. Stated differently, in 1980 about 40 percent of the rural population over age ten was illiterate, as compared with 25 percent of the urban dwellers. In the 1970s, fewer than twothirds of school-age rural children attended primary schools, as compared with more than 90 percent of their urban counterparts. About 8 percent of the country's total enrollment in middle secondary education, grades seven through nine, were rural children; at the upper secondary level, grades ten through twelve, about 1 percent were rural children. In addition, illiteracy was twice as prevalent among women as among men; only about 30 percent of higher education students were female.

The high degree of rural illiteracy reflected several factors. At the most basic level, the number of teachers and schools provided for rural areas was seriously inadequate. In the 1970s, only 15 percent of the nation's schoolteachers served in rural areas; although 64 percent of primary schools were in rural areas, only 2 percent of secondary schools were. Existing rural schools were able to accommodate only 43 percent of the rural school-age population. Furthermore, of the primary schools available for rural children, approximately 70 percent offered education only below grade five. By contrast, 90 percent of urban primary schools offered grade five or above. In rural areas, the 1976 student-to-teacher ratio was sixty to one, as compared with forty to one in urban areas.

In addition, there was a high attrition rate in school attendance in rural areas as students left school to earn incomes or work at home. It is significant that although school attendance generally began at about the age of eight or nine, about 70 percent of all male workers began work before the age of fifteen, many by age ten or earlier, thus permitting only one or two years of schooling. Many girls also dropped out of school at an early age to assume domestic responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, working in the fields, or tending animals. Therefore, in 1976 only about 20 percent of rural school-age children reached grade six, and only 5.7 percent reached grade nine.

Efforts to improve this situation in the rural agricultural areas were somewhat discouraging, in part because of the political tensions of the 1980s. In some situations, teachers, mainly women, faced threats if they were thought to be supporters of political change. Furthermore, many rural landowners seemed to prefer an uneducated rural population, on the grounds that better educated workers would expect better wages and be more likely to organize and lobby the government for reform, particularly land reform. A number of national education plans developed by the Ministry of Education had recognized the disparity between rural and urban education, but none had succeeded in bringing rural education up to the urban level.

## MIGRATION

Salvadoran migratory patterns have been shaped by socioeconomic problems such as insufficient land, limited job opportunities, low wages, and persistent poverty. Some Salvadorans emigrated permanently from the country, some moved within the rural area itself, and some moved to urban areas in search of a better life. Internal and external migration levels were augmented by the civil conflict of the 1980s, although family and community fragmentation and dislocation were longstanding characteristics of life for the lower class. These patterns can be traced to the latter half of the nineteenth century, when communal landholdings were dissolved to facilitate the

expansion of private holdings. This action created a dispossessed labor force whose movements came to be dictated by the cycles of coffee production.

Seasonal migrations from home communities to cash crop estates at times of harvest have been a way of life for many rural dwellers ever since coffee production came to dominate the Salvadoran economy (see *The Oligarchy and the Liberal State*, ch. 1). This type of migration was particularly important for land-poor peasants from the relatively infertile northern departments, hundreds of thousands of whom sought seasonal work in the central coffee regions. Similarly, as cotton farming developed in the coastal zone, both permanent laborers and thousands of seasonal harvest workers followed, particularly to land east of the Rio Lempa and within the Sonsonate coastal plain in the southwest.

Between 1945 and 1969, population increase and land loss, particularly to cotton estates, led as many as 300,000 workers and dispossessed peasants--about 7 percent of the Salvadoran population--to migrate to neighboring Honduras. There, as farm laborers, squatters, tenants, or small farmers, they joined the land-poor rural population or moved to provincial towns where they were subsumed into the Honduran labor force. By the late 1960s, these Salvadorans constituted 12 percent or more of the Honduran population, and they had established contacts among that population, which was involved in its own agrarian reform efforts. The Honduran government targeted Salvadoran immigrants as the principal impediment to land redistribution efforts, encouraging anti-Salvadoran sentiments in an attempt to diffuse tensions among Honduran peasants and agricultural workers. In the wake of the ensuing Honduran agrarian reform, in which only native Hondurans were allowed to own land, as many as 130,000 Salvadorans were forced, or chose, to give up whatever jobs or land they had acquired and return to El Salvador. The exodus of Salvadorans from Honduras contributed to the so-called "Football War" of 1969 between the two countries, and the large number of returning Salvadorans worsened social and economic tensions within El Salvador itself.

In spite of ongoing tension with Honduras, Salvadorans continued to emigrate to that country, not only as landless laborers seeking work but, in the early 1980s, as refugees fleeing the civil conflict in El Salvador. Honduras seemed a logical refuge for many, given its proximity to the bordering Salvadoran departments of Morazan, Cabanas, and Chalatenango, all areas suffering under the civil conflict during the early 1980s. In 1981 some 60,000 refugees were in Honduras, many, particularly women and children, in refugee camps near the border, camps administered under the auspices of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Life was somewhat uncertain in the camps because of the unsettled circumstances stemming from the Salvadoran conflict. These pressures, as well as the monotony of life in the camps, induced thousands of Salvadorans to return home in spite of the dangers posed by ongoing warfare. In 1987 a reported 19,000 to 20,000 refugees still resided in camps in Honduras, the majority of whom were children and the rest mainly women and the elderly.

Some 20,000 Salvadoran refugees also sought sanctuary in Nicaragua, and an estimated 80,000 to 110,000 more relocated to Guatemala and thence to Mexico, many ultimately hoping to reach the United States. Indeed, between 1979 and 1988 as many as 500,000 Salvadorans were estimated to have reached the United States, the majority via Mexico. In overall terms, the extent of Salvadoran emigration to foreign countries was such that the United Nations (UN) in 1982 estimated that one-third of the work force had left the country. The number of refugees and displaced persons in general was estimated at 1 million, or 20 percent of the population, roughly half of whom had left the country.

Displaced persons remaining in El Salvador, internal refugees uprooted by the civil conflict, followed several migratory patterns. Some moved from one rural area to another; for example, some migrants from the war zones of the east moved to the far western provinces, where guerrilla groups were less active. Some fled from smaller cities and towns to the countryside, where the number of internally displaced persons was estimated at close to 250,000 in the early 1980s. The highest concentration of refugees, however, was found in the war-torn departments of Chalatenango, Morazan, and Cabanas.

In the early 1980s, many dislocated rural persons traveled to San Salvador seeking help largely through the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Conditions for these refugees were less than ideal, as many faced severe overcrowding, continued malnutrition and illness, and harassment from security forces in the camps where they sought shelter. Others faced extreme poverty in makeshift slum settlements, trying to earn a living as street vendors.

## URBAN LIFE

Well before the civil conflict of the 1980s, rural-urban migration was an economic fact of life in El Salvador. Most rural migrants were attracted to the capital, San Salvador. Yet prospects for a better life were limited in the cities too, and El Salvador did not experience a rush to urban migration on the same scale as most other Latin American countries.

## Urbanization

In general, urbanization in El Salvador was stimulated by the success of coffee as an export crop and the growth and transformation of the wealthy coffee elite from a nineteenth-century rural gentry into a twentieth-century national elite. The political and economic dominance of the coffee oligarchy was particularly responsible for the growth of the San Salvador metropolitan area and, to a lesser extent, that of El Salvador's second city, Santa Ana. During the nineteenth century, in fact, Santa Ana, situated in the heart of the coffee region, was the largest city in El Salvador. Both Santa Ana in the west and San Miguel in the east started as agricultural towns and regional centers; over time, both developed small industrial bases and commercial and service establishments.

Both these cities, however, were overshadowed by the growth of San Salvador. Over the years, especially during export agriculture "boom" periods, a portion of the earnings made by the elite was used to develop and support San Salvador as a modern urban center, using European and then North American models as a guide. Municipal services, communications, and transportation infrastructures were established to support the agricultural export trade. Small manufacturing and food-processing establishments developed, along with fledgling construction, commercial, and transport activities. A small middle class of civilian and military public employees, commercial middlemen, and small businessmen emerged. Educational, health, and welfare services were instituted, and urban workers, students, and artisans were allowed, within limits, to organize mutual aid associations, such as cooperatives, savings associations, and clubs, and to present grievances before the government.

Urban migration appealed to some members of the rural sector more than others. Persons leaving the northern departments were drawn to urban areas in large numbers. In addition, the capital, which attracted more than 90 percent of urban migrants, generally offered greater employment opportunities and better pay to women than to men, encouraging a relatively high percentage of women to trade rural for urban life. In the countryside, government regulations either restricted labor opportunities for women or compensated them at a lower rate. Similarly, income derivable from rural women's traditional handicraft production declined in the face of competition from urban manufactured goods; as a result, these traditional handicraft items were devalued both literally and figuratively. Partially as a result of such pressures, 44 percent of the urban labor force was female by 1975, compared with only 14 percent of the rural labor force. In fact, however, the participation of women in the rural work force probably was larger because many women effectively worked without pay during coffee or cotton harvests. Only men or heads of household officially contracted to provide labor, although women and children might work in

men's crews. Thus, only men had a right to weekly payment, and only men had the legal right to a daily food allowance. When women were paid, their wages generally were one-third less than men's.

Stated differently, two-thirds of female workers in 1975 were employed in urban areas, predominantly in San Salvador; they worked at a wide variety of low-skill jobs characterized by low pay, long hours, and a lack of benefits or legal protections. The most common of these occupations was work as domestics in upper and middle-class households and as street vendors, even though vending was against the law and vendors faced police harassment. Some women also found jobs in factories in the free-zone area of the capital, where North American-owned pharmaceutical and textile factories preferred to hire women because they were thought to be more reliable workers than men (see *Foreign Economic Relations*, ch. 3). Many women, especially the least educated, engaged in prostitution.

### Quality of Life

Given the nature of available work, urban centers offered relatively little improvement in job opportunities for rural migrants. Although a small percentage of the work force was organized into labor unions, wages generally were kept low in the urban as well as in the rural sector. During the 1970s, an estimated 90 percent of urban workers received less than the legal minimum wage. In 1977 the average daily wage in urban manufacturing and service sectors was the equivalent of US\$2.80. In 1983 observers estimated that a family needed 3.7 wage earners to buy a basic basket of goods. According to government figures, only 53,467 workers earned enough to buy the basic basket, while 1,283,058 did not. Of those who did not, approximately 800,000 could buy no more than 25 percent of the basic basket. In terms of purchasing power, poor urban workers earned about the same income as landless rural workers, so there was not a strong economic incentive for urban migration. In fact, like landless rural laborers, underemployed or unemployed city dwellers sometimes sought seasonal work as harvesters on agricultural estates.

The urban job market reflected the state of industrialization and manufacturing in El Salvador. During the decade of the 1960s, manufacturing growth was strong as the Central American Common Market enhanced export opportunities (see *Manufacturing*, ch. 3). During this period, the total number of persons employed in industry, including coffee, sugar, and cotton processing, increased markedly, mainly in San Salvador. The increase in manufacturing jobs, however, was not as great; this was attributable in part to the generally capital-intensive nature of manufacturing in El Salvador.

Although the total number of industrial jobs grew, these jobs actually declined as a proportion of the total labor market during the 1960s, dropping from about 13 percent in 1961 to about 10 percent in 1971. Consequently, many urban workers displaced by manufacturing technology and newcomers from rural areas were forced into the informal job sector or into petty thievery and similar activities.

Because the cities, and especially San Salvador, were also the home, indeed the stronghold, of the elite, by the early twentieth century San Salvador displayed a sharp dichotomy between great wealth and extreme poverty, between those who owned expensive automobiles and those who walked barefoot beside ox carts. These differences became more pronounced during the course of the twentieth century. The families of the oligarchy and the high ranks of the military lived in material comfort and in a rather insulated fashion, avoiding contact with the poor, who were ridiculed, deprecated, and despised but also feared by the urban wealthy. The elite emulated West European and North American values and life-styles, emphasizing material goods, conspicuous consumption, and the "good life."

The city gave clear evidence of the social tensions and crises existing between the rich and the poor. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the area of housing, which evidenced a severe shortage for the majority of poor and a kind of fortress mentality among the elite. Housing problems were dramatically increased in October 1986 by an earthquake centered on San Salvador, which left more than 200,000 homeless.

Of the 858,000 persons living in San Salvador in 1980, an estimated 643,000 lived in slum settlements either in the center of the city or on the periphery. Squatter communities included those newly arrived from the countryside as well as the long-term urban poor who, given the extensive unemployment and lack of opportunity in general, had not managed to improve their standard of living. In the approximately 100 tugurios (shantytowns), single-room dwellings were constructed of tin, cardboard, and cloth, sometimes with bahareque walls and tiled roofs. The majority had dirt floors, no electricity, and no access to any kind of water and sewage services. These hovels typically were crowded onto nationally or municipally owned land, such as riverbeds or rights-of-way.

Dozens of similar settlements also appeared on privately owned land held for speculation and rented at exorbitant rates. Often shanties were erected on such land before the owner was aware

of the fact, and rent was a matter subsequently worked out between the squatters and the landowner. Just as municipal or national authorities did not guarantee permanent settlement on tugurio sites, so private landowners were not reconciled to permanent settlement by the tenants on their land and attempted to evict them if a more lucrative use for the land emerged.

Slums of a different sort, called mesones, were located in the central city. They were privately owned single-story compounds composed of a connected series of five, ten, or twenty or more rooms, each roughly four meters square, surrounding a common courtyard. Mesones typically lacked washing or cooking facilities; some included access to a common latrine. Each room was rented to a separate tenant, either an individual or a small family. Residents of mesones contrasted with those of turgorios in household size, as the latter tended to live in larger and more heterogeneous households, partly because of the general lack of landlord or government control over their living conditions.

Legally constructed private housing equipped with modern facilities and appliances was available only for middle- and upper-class Salvadorans. The homes of the elite, many of them located on the clean streets of San Benito, the wealthiest neighborhood in San Salvador, typically were surrounded by walls two to three meters high or more, topped with barbed wire and sometimes electrified. Watchtowers, gun ports, and closed-circuit television systems to monitor the grounds were not uncommon.

In urban slums, as in rural areas, poor housing, inadequate and unsafe water, poor sanitation, and overcrowding created medical problems, particularly infectious diseases, that compounded the ill effects of such poor living conditions. The urban infant mortality rate was, however, lower than the rural infant mortality rate (85 and 120 per 1,000 live births, respectively, in the mid-1970s).

Well-to-do Salvadorans had far better access than lower-class Salvadorans to medical facilities and social security benefits, especially in urban areas. Health service delivery, though planned on a nationwide scale, clearly favored urban dwellers (see Health and Welfare, this ch.).

Better education also was available in the city, and more people were able to take advantage of it. In 1976 about 61.7 percent of urban students reached the ninth grade, as compared with 5.7 percent of rural students. Some 90 percent of urban children attended primary school, and over 90 percent of all national enrollment in grades seven through twelve was urban. Nonetheless, the

urban poor had the least likelihood of pursuing education beyond one or two years of primary classes, since school attendance required cash outlays for materials, special activities, or uniforms. Primary-school-age children, especially boys, also were able to earn a few centavos (100 centavos equals 1 Salvadoran colon; for value of the colon--see Glossary) on the streets with odd jobs, such as selling newspapers, shining shoes, running errands, or watching cars, to supplement the family income.

University training was an important part of the urban education program in San Salvador, where university enrollment reached 35,000 in the 1970s. The main campus of the National University, or University of El Salvador, was located in the capital, but branch campuses were also found in the secondary cities, such as Santa Ana.

Traditionally, the National University enjoyed a high degree of institutional autonomy in its activities in spite of a long tradition of politically active students. As the political and economic problems of the nation deepened during the 1970s, however, the university came to function not only as a lively and protected forum for political dialogue but also as a haven for political activists, a center for communication and coordination of activities among politically active opposition groups, and a recruiting source for radical leftist guerrilla groups. All the mass organizations associated with the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Marti de Liberacion Nacional--FMLN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (Frente Democratico Revolucionario--FDR) came to have offices there, and the university was used as a press and a public forum by their representatives (see Political Parties , ch. 4; Left-Wing Extremism , ch. 5).

This situation changed abruptly in 1980 when the army closed the San Salvador campus based on evidence that it was being used as an armory and refuge by members of guerrilla groups. The university staff continued to operate on a greatly reduced, makeshift basis from rented space scattered throughout the city, enabling some 10,000 university students to continue their studies. In the violent atmosphere that prevailed at that time, some staff members were targeted for attack by right-wing groups, some were arrested, and the university rector was assassinated. With the closing of the university campus, some twenty-five private universities, with a combined enrollment of 25,000 persons, sprang up. These schools were both far more expensive to attend than the National University, which had charged only the equivalent of US\$36 for annual tuition, and more conservative in attitude.

The Jesuit-operated Central American University Jose Simeon Canas (Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Canas--UCA), originally established in 1966 by the elite to provide a conservative Catholic education for their children, continued to operate. The staff developed more liberal leanings than its oligarchical supporters originally intended, however. Members of the faculty and administration strongly supported political and economic reforms and published political, social, and economic studies on national and regional affairs. Although the university remained open during the 1980s, it was not immune from rightist attacks on its faculty and facilities.

## SOCIAL DYNAMICS

The conditions of economic and social inequality that defined the basic cleavages within Salvadoran society also generated strong political and ideological dynamics within and among groups pressing either for change or for maintenance of the status quo. Further insights into the nature of Salvadoran life, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, may be obtained by considering the following within that broader societal context: the impact of governmental agrarian reform programs; the reaction of portions of the general populace, particularly popular organizations and guerrilla groups, to the political and economic climate; and the positions and actions taken by the Roman Catholic Church and by Protestant missionaries in these matters.

### Agrarian Reform

During the 1970s, as Salvadoran emigrants returned from Honduras, increased pressure for available land pushed the issue of agrarian reform to the forefront of national life. Various peasant and trade union organizations, with the tacit support of many others, including middle-sector business people, professionals, and public-sector employees, as well as certain church groups, increased their activities and demonstrations in support of reform. The response from the military-controlled government stressed the maintenance of public order, through repression if necessary, over political change. The polarizing effect of this attitude prompted concerned pro-reform military officers to take power in 1979. One of the priorities of the junta governments that followed was agrarian reform (see *The Reformist Coup of 1979*, ch. 1).

Peasant organizations were disorganized, mainly as a result of violent actions directed against their members by right-wing groups, and were unable to exert much influence on the junta government at the time of the original agrarian reform decree in 1980. For its part, the government also failed to consult with these groups regarding the best ways to proceed in such an undertaking. Having the most to lose in this process, the majority of the economic elite,

particularly the agrarian and financial interests, bitterly opposed such measures on principle. These interests had opposed--and successfully defeated in the planning stage--several earlier agrarian reform measures suggested by previous governments (see *The 1970s: The Road to Revolt*, ch. 1).

The overall agrarian reform program was to be implemented in three phases, only the first of which achieved any effective results. Phase I called for the expropriation of all landholdings over 500 hectares, with owners allowed to keep as "reserve" 100 to 150 hectares, depending on land quality, in order to continue farming. The government, aided by the army, expropriated over 230 estates, comprising 15 percent of El Salvador's farmland (or 10 percent, if reserve lands are excluded). This included 14 percent of total coffee land, 31 percent of cotton land, and 24 percent of sugarcane land; over 60 percent of the expropriated holdings, however, were pasture or fallow land, including forests and mountains not well suited to cultivation.

The expropriated estates were not subdivided, but were turned into cooperatives run by a hierarchy of skilled managers and unskilled laborers. Under this arrangement, little changed in terms of day-to-day operations. In spite of the communal implications of the cooperative concept, the traditional social hierarchy of managers and unskilled labor remained. In many cases, the same administrators, who still had strong ties with previous landlords and their interests, gave the same orders to the same workers, who saw little evidence of change in their day-to-day situation. The former landowners initially continued to derive income from production on the cooperatives, as part of the cooperatives' profits went to an agrarian reform fund from which the former owners were to be compensated. In addition, because the former landowners could retain 100 hectares, they were often able to keep control of the best land or of processing facilities, which, if necessary, could be reclassified as urban properties. Some landowners also had sufficient time to begin to decapitalize their farms. Some had removed livestock and machinery; others had slaughtered cattle rather than transfer them to the newly created cooperatives. These actions significantly reduced the value of the cooperatives, especially considering that the majority of land affected by Phase I was pasture land.

Since the members of the cooperatives included only the few full-time workers on estates at the time of expropriation, which took place during an off-season period of low labor needs, Phase I did not affect the majority of the population in these regions. Similarly, because the expropriated estates were located in the coastal plain and central valleys, they did not benefit landless peasants in the north and east. Of an original 317 cooperatives, 22 had been abandoned by 1987 as a result of inadequate technical and credit assistance from the government, as well as the adverse economic effects of the civil conflict.

As of 1987, Phase II of the agrarian reform program had not been implemented. The official explanation for the prolonged inaction cited shortcomings in administrative expertise and financial resources; unofficially, political pressures appeared to be equally influential. Phase II originally called for expropriation of all estates between 100 and 500 hectares in size. Many larger landowners, sensing that land reform was imminent, had previously divided their larger estates among family members, and their holdings, including many coffee estates, now fell within this range.

The junta governments' failure to implement Phase II allowed the Constituent Assembly to redefine the provisions of land reform that eventually were incorporated into the Constitution of 1983 (see The Constitution of 1983 , ch. 4). The assembly, dominated by representatives of conservative political parties, raised the ceiling on maximum allowable landholdings from 100 to 245 hectares. This had the effect of reducing the amount of land available for redistribution from about 72,400 hectares, or 5 percent of Salvadoran farmland, to about 54,300 hectares, or 3.7 percent of farmland. Owners of medium-sized farms had been prohibited by the original 1980 reform decree from selling their holdings; the assembly now granted these owners up to three years to sell their excess holdings to peasants or peasant associations. This provision shifted the onus of reallocation of land from the government to the landowners, thus ameliorating somewhat the problem of inadequate government resources for this purpose.

Phase III, also known as the Land to the Tiller program, mandated that ownership of land that was leased, rented, or sharecropped would be transferred to the tiller. Implementation of this phase was slow and difficult. If fully realized, Phase III was projected to involve some 13.6 percent of farmland and some 117,000 peasant families. Each beneficiary was allowed to seek title to no more than seven hectares; in practice, given the small size of existing rental plots, many were granted title to plots well below that size; as of 1987, the average Phase III beneficiary had been granted title to a plot of less than two hectares.

By mid-1987 only 56,188 potential beneficiaries had applied for title to 79,142 parcels of land. The granting of definitive titles was hampered by bureaucratic inefficiency and chronic budget shortfalls, so that the overwhelming majority of claimants were forced to continue working the land under provisional title. The failure to grant even provisional titles to the remaining 60,000 or so potential beneficiaries was attributed in part to the inability of the government to contact all of these small farmers. Furthermore, the seven-hectare limit, also referred to as the retention rule, excluded some 12,000 beneficiaries who did not farm their land directly but were landlords of

smallholdings. In its early stages, implementation of Phase III was also complicated by the illegal eviction of peasants by landowners.

Moreover, the involvement of army personnel in the implementation of agrarian reform led to an upsurge in combat between government and guerrilla forces in the countryside. This was the case particularly in the northern departments of Chalatenango, Morazan, and Cuscatlan, where there were few privately owned estates but where rural mass organizations were influential. The heightened army presence, combined with population dislocation, reportedly contributed to increased civil unrest in these areas.

### Revolutionary Groups

During the 1960s and 1970s, some of the population sought expression and perhaps eventual redress for their problems by becoming involved in a wide variety of "mass organizations" (also known as popular organizations), such as those included in the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses (Coordinadora Revolucionaria de las Masas--CRM) (see *The Reformist Coup of 1979*, ch. 1). These groups, once tens of thousands strong, were heavily urban oriented and included a range of trade unionists, teachers, clergy, professionals, students, and other middle-class and urban lower-class workers interested in social and economic reform. The tactics of the mass organizations included strikes, street demonstrations, mass rallies, and occupation of public buildings (churches, government buildings, and embassies), factories, and farms.

In the countryside, the mass organizations found some support among landless campesinos mainly in the hills around the central valleys and in the northern mountains (the departments of Chalatenango, San Salvador, Cuscatlan, Cabanas, and San Vicente). Laborers on the coastal plain, where estate owners and administrators exercised greater influence, showed less enthusiasm for the mass organizations.

Whereas some of the rural poor hoped to exert pressure for change through participation in the popular organizations, others joined the ranks of more conservative, officially sanctioned organizations. One of these, the Salvadoran Communal Union (Union Comunal Salvadorena--UCS), begun in 1966, sought to address the needs of small farmers through limited programs of technical assistance and credit facilities. By 1980 the UCS claimed 100,000 members.

Another peasant organization, the Nationalist Democratic Organization (Organizacion Democratica Nacionalista--Orden), claimed as many as 100,000 members in the late 1970s. Established in the 1960s under military rule, Orden had close ties to the GN (see *The Security Forces* , ch. 5). In return for cooperation with the GN in areas such as intelligence and civil defense, members of Orden were eligible for benefits such as favorable credit terms on government agricultural loans, priority consideration for permanent estate jobs, and employment on public works project. Orden was disbanded officially by a decree of the first 1979 junta government, but some observers believed that it continued to function unofficially after that date (see *The Reformist Coup of 1979* , ch. 1).

In the 1970s, activists from mass organizations joined the ranks of various guerrilla organizations (see *The 1970s: The Road to Revolt* , ch. 1; *Left-Wing Extremism* , ch. 5). Guerrilla membership was diverse and included trade unionists, students, teachers, other disaffected members of the middle class, urban workers, and peasants.

In early 1981, Salvadoran guerrilla groups who were united under the banner of the FMLN estimated that they controlled 10 percent of Salvadoran territory. By 1983 the FMLN's claims had risen to 30 percent. Although guerrilla forces exerted influence over certain areas, they had not achieved control in the sense of being able to secure territory against concerted efforts, usually "sweeps" by at least battalion-sized units, by government forces to reestablish access (see *Left-Wing Extremism* , ch. 5). Generally, the guerrilla movement was most active to the north and to the east of the Rio Lempa, in the departments of Chalatenango, Cabanas, Morazan, Cuscatlan, San Vicente, and Usulután. Guerrilla activities were less frequent in the more affluent western half of the country, roughly to the west of the Rio Lempa.

From the guerrilla perspective, El Salvador was seen as divided into three different "fields of struggle" depending on the nature of their activities there. The "liberated areas" or "zones of control," in the north and east, were areas where communications with the rest of the country had been cut off, where the government and the military had not established a permanent presence, and where strings of guerrilla camps exerted influence over the local population. The so-called "disputed" areas in the central part of the country were contested by guerrilla forces living among the rural population and by government forces stationed in towns. The third area, the cities, experienced comparatively little open antigovernment violence, although sporadic terrorist actions by both rightist and leftist groups persisted after the mid-1970s (see *Threats to Internal Security* , ch. 5).

In the isolated "zones of control," as in other rural areas, amenities were few: no electricity, water taken from streams and springs, and no sanitation facilities. Agricultural production on family plots and collective farms provided food for guerrilla combatants as well as for local residents. According to sympathetic foreign observers, the guerrillas provided some social services, including at least rudimentary medical care, using both modern and traditional herbal methods, and education programs. Although supplies were either limited or nonexistent, literacy programs for all ages, using sticks to scratch in the earth in lieu of pens and paper, and education in first aid and basic sanitation measures were conducted. These courses served to provide basic education to a largely illiterate population and to prepare them to provide medical and logistical support to FMLN combatants. Town meetings were held to discuss issues of local concern and to elect councils with representatives responsible for agriculture, health, education, and information. Religious activities compatible with the tenets of liberation theology (see Glossary) were encouraged. Security and early warning of armed forces operations in the area were provided by local militia drawn from the pool of younger residents.

Another aspect of the guerrillas' ideology stressed equality for women as comrades in the political-military struggle. This, in many cases, represented a considerable and sometimes difficult adjustment for people from a culture that placed an exceptionally strong value on machismo, where women traditionally were regarded as inferior. Discrimination against women was further reinforced in Salvadoran rural life, particularly in the area of labor. Government wage scales either excluded women from permanent labor positions; set a lower minimum wage for women, along with boys under sixteen and the handicapped; or did not pay women at all if they worked in a men's crew. Educational opportunities for girls were also more limited because of the need for their assistance at home at an early age. In territory influenced by the guerrillas, however, some observers reported that wife-beating was discouraged, an effort was made to assign tasks more equitably, and men were taught to view women as *companeras* (comrades). Thus, men might cook and wash clothes, while women fought, or directed development projects, or did construction work. In fact, 40 percent of leadership and 30 percent of combatant roles were filled by women in guerrilla zones. Yet even in these communities, there were limits to change; tortillamaking, for example, remained a female task.

### The Role of Religion

As a Hispanic country, El Salvador has always had a strong Roman Catholic identity. The majority of Salvadorans in the late 1980s were at least nominal Roman Catholics, and church rituals permeated the nation's culture and society. Church attendance, especially for women, remained important, church sacraments and ceremonies such as baptism and confirmation were observed, and fiestas were held to celebrate patron saints of villages, towns, and cities.

Nevertheless, El Salvador tended to be somewhat more secular than its Central American neighbors. Birth control programs introduced in the late 1960s met with less opposition than elsewhere in Latin America. Marriage--in a religious or civil ceremony--was not as prevalent in El Salvador as in many other Latin American countries (this situation also reflected the strain exerted on social institutions by persistent poverty); many Salvadoran couples, especially in rural areas, lived together in common-law or free unions, many families were headed by women, and many children were born out of wedlock. Lastly, the ritual kinship practice of *compadrazgo* (selecting godparents for children) was becoming less widespread and less important in El Salvador.

Although the Roman Catholic Church, as typified by its hierarchy, was conservative in its approach to doctrine, a strain of reformist Catholicism called "social Christianity" emerged in El Salvador, as elsewhere in Latin America, in the 1930s in response to the hardships, uprisings, and repressions of that period. Social Christianity, which continued to have some appeal until the early 1960s, stressed the duty of lay persons to remedy social ills without waiting for the religious hierarchy, represented by its priests, to act. Although this movement did not advocate change in the basic social and political structure of the country, it called for improvements by working within the existing political order.

At least one influential individual at the top of the social and religious pyramid recognized and encouraged the need for improvements in the lives of those in the lower sector--the archbishop of San Salvador, Luis Chavez y Gonzalez, who held this position from 1939 to 1977. Archbishop Chavez encouraged the priesthood as a vocation; built a seminary in San Salvador; established the Pius XII Institute, organized particularly to teach the Roman Catholic Church's social doctrine; and sent priests to study in Europe. It is also noteworthy that these Salvadoran priests came mainly from rural families, albeit fairly well-to-do ones, rather than from the urban middle class, and hence had closer ties to the peasantry. It is significant too that even in the early 1950s Chavez encouraged cooperatives as alternatives for peasants' losing land to agribusiness expansion and that he sent priests to Canada to study cooperatives. In this sense, he presaged the communitarianism later advocated by the Salvadoran Christian Democratic Party (*Partido Democrata Cristiano--PDC*).

In the late 1960s, the social attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador, as elsewhere, were deeply influenced by Vatican Council II (in 1965) and the social encyclicals of Pope John XXIII, as well as by the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, which addressed the issues of Vatican II from a distinctly Latin American perspective. These gatherings, particularly the Medellin conference, emphasized the need for a

more worldly involvement by the Roman Catholic clergy with the lives and problems of parishioners and advocated activist programs to improve the living conditions of the lower class. This "preferential option for the poor" was the germ of what later came to be known as "liberation theology." The church increased and encouraged involvement in programs for change after the Medellin conference, even if this involvement entailed secular political advocacy.

Toward this end, activist clergy and laity created grass-roots Christian Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiasticas de Base--CEBs) to work toward their conception of social justice; these groups encouraged church members to take the initiative in seeking social and political change and to act more independently of the church hierarchy, if necessary, to achieve their goals. In short, in contrast to the earlier social Christianity, where change was to be effected within the existing social and political order, liberation theology called for changes in social and political structures and encouraged the laity to take an active role in bringing them about. In El Salvador, the social concerns of Archbishop Chavez helped pave the way for later advocates of liberation theology and, in a way, linked this broad Latin American movement of the 1970s with the social Christian movements of the prior decades.

A number of rural communities were receptive to the teachings and methods of the base communities. Generally, the organization of the CEBs involved a priest or a trained religious worker who met with twenty to thirty local parishioners for a few weeks. As this group met to study and discuss selected passages from the Bible and plan community activities, lay leaders were encouraged to emerge, and the group was taught to appreciate and emphasize the role of laypersons like themselves in social change. They discussed the earthly social, economic, and political reasons for their plight as poor peasants and laborers and were taught by priests and lay workers that the poor were equal before God with the rich landowners. During the 1970s, some 15,000 local lay leaders, catechists or delegates, underwent further training at seven centers set up throughout the country, studying the Bible, liturgy, agriculture, cooperativism, leadership, and health, all in preparation for their roles as religious, social, and political leaders in community development efforts. The role of local lay preachers and leaders also reflected the high ratio of laity to priests in El Salvador, which at that time was approximately 10,000 to one.

The CEBs soon encountered harassment and hostility, apparently emanating from the economic and political elite. By the late 1970s, violence by right-wing groups was directed against members of the priesthood and other church workers known to be sympathetic to the CEBs on the grounds that assisting the poor constituted subversive activity. As civil unrest in general increased in the late 1970s, the church as a whole became increasingly polarized. The majority of the bishops supported the traditional role of the church, the traditional authority of the hierarchy,

and the overriding authority of the government. Allied against this view was a faction of parish priests who favored the development of the CEBs and advocated expanded aid for the poor.

Once again, the position of the archbishop became crucial. In 1977 Archbishop Chavez resigned and was replaced by Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez. Like his predecessor, Archbishop Romero spoke out publicly in favor of social justice for the general populace. He increasingly assumed the role of the leading advocate on behalf of the poor; his primary vehicles for expressing these views were his weekly Sunday morning homilies, broadcast throughout the nation and eagerly listened to on portable radios or the ubiquitous village loudspeakers in the plazas. As political tensions rose, the influential position and strong impact of the outspoken archbishop became intolerable to the Salvadoran right, and Romero was assassinated one Monday in March 1980 while saying mass.

Violence against grass-roots church activities continued during the early 1980s, with telling effect. The number of active priests declined, so that 40 percent of rural parishes lacked priests, and many CEBs were dismantled or forced underground. Of the 15,000 lay leaders active in CEBs, some joined the guerrillas, while others withdrew from church activities altogether. Monsignor Arturo Rivera y Damas, appointed archbishop after Romero's murder, found it appropriate to take a more distant or ambivalent position with respect to the question of the proper role of the church in Salvadoran national life, a position that also accorded more closely with the conservative attitude of the Vatican under Pope John Paul II. Meanwhile, although the church proper now lowered its public profile, a small, quasi-independent "people's church" emerged from the remnants of the CEB movement. Some priests, mainly Jesuits, continued to work in guerrilla-controlled areas, where the social and political importance of organized communities among the poor continued to be emphasized.

Protestant missionaries were quite active in El Salvador, the majority representing the evangelical branch of North American Protestantism. Evangelical activity was a multinational, multimillion-dollar enterprise developed and packaged in the United States, translated into Spanish, and exported not only to El Salvador but also to the other countries of Central America. Missionaries working for scores of organizations used crusades, door-to-door proselytizing, radio programs, food aid, and health care to advance their fundamentalist message of personal salvation through belief in Jesus, a salvation not to be gained in this world but in the afterlife. To these theologically conservative evangelicals, Roman Catholics were not Christians; only the "born-again" were God's chosen people, and efforts to achieve social gains by working for change in this life were inappropriate. Although "mainline" Protestant denominations encouraged expressions of concern over social problems, the brand of evangelical Protestantism that swept

Central America in the 1970s and 1980s sought to remove its adherents from social action, to place the onus on God rather than on humans to act, and to inculcate passive, apathetic, and submissive resignation while waiting for the second coming of Christ. Put more bluntly, the thought of future salvation would cushion the impact of current suffering.

Protestantism was by no means new to Central America or to El Salvador. In the late nineteenth century, the majority of British and German immigrants, including coffee traders and financiers, were Protestants. In 1896 the aggressive Central American Mission (CAM), headquartered in North America and financed by North Americans, was established in El Salvador and Guatemala. The primary message of the CAM was that the sad state of the world was a necessary and predestined situation heralding the imminence of the second coming. In later years, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, and others joined the growing missionary movement in Central America.

Protestantism continued to grow steadily in El Salvador, particularly during the economic depression and political repression of the 1930s. The annual growth rate of the Protestant community in the country stood at 9 percent between 1930 and 1945 but dropped to 7 percent between 1945 and 1960. A dramatic resurgence appeared in the 1970s with an average annual rate of Protestant conversion of 11 percent. Some observers have attributed this impressive growth to a rejection of politicized social activism as exemplified by liberation theology. Others have interpreted the high rate of Protestant conversion as a withdrawal from the violence and instability of Salvadoran life in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, the popularity of evangelical Protestantism seems to have correlated with the intensity and nature of population displacement. As the number of land-poor laborers grew and migrant labor increased, and as the bonds of community, extended family, and tradition were broken for many, traditional Catholicism was unable to fill the personal sense of emotional loss and lack of direction. This was particularly true because the number of priests and clerics was small. Protestantism, however, offered a personalistic message of Jesus' acceptance of the individual, emphasized each individual's direct relationship to God unmediated by a hierarchical clergy, and held out hope that sustained even desperately poor people with a sense of self-worth in the face of violence, displacement, and misery.

The elite found an ideological ally in this brand of Protestantism, not only for its apolitical approach but also for its laissez-faire, entrepreneurial, work-oriented values and its willingness to

minimize the responsibility of the existing system for the nation's ills. Elites thus gladly supported evangelizing efforts on their landed estates, and significant numbers of upper-class Salvadorans converted to Protestantism.

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The political events of the late 1970s and 1980s have given rise to a considerable number of readily available books, articles, and newspaper accounts detailing the conditions of life in El Salvador. An excellent introduction to both historical and current economic, political, and especially social conditions in El Salvador can be found in Philip L. Russell's *El Salvador in Crisis* and in Alastair White's *El Salvador. El Salvador: The Face of Revolution* by Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk also provides an impassioned and readable account of the social and economic conditions underlying the civil war. *Margin of Life* by Cornell Capa and J. Mayone Stycos presents evocative photography and text illustrating the often harsh reality of everyday life for the impoverished majority living in both urban and rural settings in El Salvador and Honduras.

On more specific issues, Phillip Berryman's *The Religious Roots of Rebellion* discusses the background to liberation theology in Latin America and the specific role of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador. Articles in *NACLA Report on the Americas* by the North American Congress on Latin America present an overview of the activities and theology of Protestant missions in Central America. Also recommended for general reading is Part I of Enrique A. Baloyra's *El Salvador in Transition*, which contains a helpful overview of the nature of the military government and the oligarchical elite within a socioeconomic context. A. Douglas Kincaid's, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador" analyzes the significance of community solidarity as a factor in the history of social unrest in El Salvador. "Agrarian Reform in El Salvador" by David Browning provides an excellent overview of the social, political, and economic contexts of agrarian reform, and Robert G. Williams's *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America* is highly recommended as a very readable account of the economic and social conditions underlying political instability in Central America in general. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

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