This material is used by permission of Ohio University Press, www.ohioswallow.com.

Ohio University Research in International Studies

This series of publications on Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Global and Comparative Studies is designed to present significant research, translation, and opinion to area specialists and to a wide community of persons interested in world affairs. The editors seek manuscripts of quality on any subject and can usually make a decision regarding publication within three months of receipt of the original work. Production methods generally permit a work to appear within one year of acceptance. The editors work closely with authors to produce high-quality books. The series is distributed worldwide. For more information, consult the Ohio University Press website, ohioswallow.com.

Books in the Ohio University Research in International Studies series are published by Ohio University Press in association with the Center for International Studies. The views expressed in individual volumes are those of the authors and should not be considered to represent the policies or beliefs of the Center for International Studies, Ohio University Press, or Ohio University.

Captured Peace

Elites and Peacebuilding in El Salvador

Christine J. Wade

Ohio University Press
Research in International Studies
Latin America Series No. 52
Athens, Ohio

© 2016 by the
Center for International Studies
Ohio University
All rights reserved

To obtain permission to quote, reprint, or otherwise reproduce or distribute material from Ohio University Press publications, please contact our rights and permissions department at (740) 593-1154 or (740) 593-4536 (fax).
www.ohioswallow.com

Printed in the United States of America

The books in the Ohio University Research in International Studies Series are printed on acid-free paper ∞ ™

26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wade, Christine J.
Title: Captured peace : elites and peacebuilding in El Salvador / Christine J. Wade.
Description: Athens, Ohio : Ohio University Press, 2016. | Series: Ohio University research in international studies ; no. 52 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015038304| ISBN 9780896802971 (hardcover : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780896802988 (paperback : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780896804913 (PDF)
Subjects: LCSH: El Salvador—Politics and government—1992- | Elite (Social sciences)—Political activity—El Salvador—History. | Peace-building—Social aspects—El Salvador—History. | Social control—El Salvador—History. | Political violence—El Salvador—History. | Violence—Economic aspects—El Salvador—History. | Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (El Salvador) | Political parties—El Salvador—History. | Political participation—El Salvador—History. | BISAC: POLITICAL SCIENCE / General. | SOCIAL SCIENCE / General. | POLITICAL SCIENCE / Peace.
Classification: LCC F1488.5 .W33 2016 | DDC 972.8405/3—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015038304

For Greg

Chapter 4 examines the postwar economy, which has been characterized by deepening economic exclusion through the application of the neoliberal model across four successive ARENA administrations. The policies implemented under the administration of Alfredo Cristiani were concurrent with the negotiation of the peace accords and the early phases of their implementation. The continued application of the model by the Calderón Sol and Flores administrations deepened the reforms, which resulted in increased political and social opposition. The popular dissatisfaction with the economy under Flores led to a change in discourse under the Saca administration, which was instead imbued with populist language and social programs while continuing neoliberal policies. ARENA's policies did little to alleviate socioeconomic exclusion, and the economy became overly dependent on remittances sent back from Salvadorans living abroad. The failure of these policies was exposed by the global financial crisis, from which the country has yet to recover. I also assess the extent to which the Funes administration was able to diverge from the model established by the ARENA governments and the conflicts that arose as a result of policies that threatened elite interests. Additionally, various corruption scandals exposed the extent to which those in power used the state for their own benefit.

Chapter 5 addresses three dominant problems of postwar society: migration, crime, and the limitation of political space for civil society. Social exclusion and marginalization have both political and economic roots that precede the peace accords, although the impact of neoliberalism and the retraction of the state from public spheres have contributed greatly to these problems. The failure to deal with these issues has resulted in the mass emigration of Salvadorans in the postwar era, which has resulted in the deterioration of families and society and has helped fuel a wave of crime and violence of epic proportions, for which El Salvador has now become notorious. The multifaceted causes of this crime and violence are examined, which includes a discussion of state complicity and failures during the implementation of security reforms. This chapter also explores policy responses to crime and highlights how ARENA used social exclusion and authoritarianism as instruments of the state to maintain the status quo.

In the final chapter I summarize the book's major findings and discuss the extent to which it is possible to reclaim the captured peace. I also discuss the lessons that El Salvador's captured peace holds for peacebuilders and seek to identify mechanisms that might limit the advantage of incumbent elites.

Chapter 1

Elites and the Salvadoran State

> The main bequest of the nineteenth century was a small elite, entrenched in power and virtually closed to newcomers, that was to shape the twentieth century. . . . Upon those weak foundations they built a structure heavy with injustices, inconsistencies, and political ineptitude.
>
> —Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, 1990[1]

EL SALVADOR WAS a backwater colony of the Spanish empire in Latin America, which lacked the natural resources and labor pool that were so plentiful in countries such as Mexico and Peru. As a consequence, little investment in the basic infrastructure of the country took place before independence. While an independent El Salvador inherited the poverty of its colonial past, much of the extreme inequality of Salvadoran society is often attributed to the development of the coffee oligarchy known as Las Catorce (the Fourteen Families).[2] The country's oligarchy ruled El Salvador by itself for the first century after independence, then through the military for a sixty-year period beginning in the 1930s, using force to quell any real or perceived challenge to the status quo. Even modest attempts to alter the social order were resisted by elites, who relied on an intricate nexus of political patronage, the military,

and state and financial institutions to protect their interests. As Elisabeth Wood has so astutely noted, "Salvadoran history is thus characterized by elite resistance to change."[3] This resistance ultimately culminated in a violent civil war during the 1980s. This chapter focuses on the historical efforts of the oligarchy, in alliance with the military, to preserve power, extend economic dominance, and control the population. In doing so, it highlights the sources and structures of elite entrenchment that would make the captured peace possible.

El Salvador's "Radical Liberalism"

At the time of Central American independence,[4] in 1823, the Salvadoran economy was largely dedicated to the production of indigo.[5] By the mid-nineteenth century, however, El Salvador's once booming trade in indigo declined significantly due to the manufacture of cheaper dyes in Germany. Additionally, the U.S. Civil War resulted in a decreased demand for the Salvadoran export, and shipping the crop was complicated by a naval blockade. Recognizing that the indigo market was shrinking, exporters began searching for a replacement crop.

Coffee and the State

El Salvador's rich volcanic soil and mountainous terrain were ideal for the cultivation of coffee, which grows at altitudes higher than 750 meters above sea level. The introduction of coffee in the mid-nineteenth century coincided with the expansion of the state apparatus at a time when the country's Conservatives and Liberals were fighting for political dominance. Coffee and land were at the heart of the dispute. In the mid-nineteenth century, El Salvador's land system was divided into private, communal, public, and communal lands (*ejidos*).[6] As coffee cultivation spread, the desire for land ownership increased and coffee growers increasingly pressured local governments to sell town lands. After several municipalities conceded, coffee growers began to pressure the national government.[7] In 1847 the Salvadoran legislature passed its first law supporting coffee, offering service exemptions and tax benefits to those who had more than fifteen thousand coffee trees.[8] In 1859 and again in 1863, Gen. Gerardo Barrios, often credited with introducing coffee to El Salvador, offered to transfer public land to private hands

on the condition that the land be used for coffee production.[9] Much of the infrastructure that developed during the mid- to late nineteenth century was designed to benefit the export of coffee.

El Salvador's Liberals believed that coffee held the key to the country's modernization and prosperity. The Liberals were able to consolidate power by using the state to create policies directly benefiting coffee production. The liberal land reforms of 1881 and 1882 abolished communal lands, which were considered an "impediment to agricultural production and economic growth" by the oligarchy.[10] Opposition to the ejido system was not limited to the oligarchy. As Aldo Lauria-Santiago demonstrates, other social groups opposed the ejido system as well.[11] While the reforms did create an opportunity for other groups, the vast majority of the land was claimed by the agrarian class.[12] Under the 1881–82 reforms, thousands of campesinos were madee landless and were subsequently forced to work on haciendas. The "land reform" strengthened the Liberals' control of the economy and the state by further concentrating wealth in the hands of a select few. Seventy-three percent of the land confiscated by the reforms was distributed to 5.6 percent of the new owners, while 50 percent of the owners received 3.45 percent of the land.[13] Banks were created to facilitate the purchase of new lands. In 1880e Banco Internacional was established as El Salvador's first commercial bank. Banco Occidental was founded in 1890 and Banco Agricola Comercial in 1895. By the end of the century, there were more than half a dozen banks dedicated to financing the agricultural sector. The availability of land and financing enabled both large and small growers to expand coffee cultivation. It also increased the power of coffee growers vis-à-vis the state. Thus, coffee, the state, and finance became entangled early in El Salvador's history.

One noteworthy characteristic of the Salvadoran elites was their espousal of the virtues of liberalism alongside mechanisms, policies, and practices that were distinctly illiberal. From very early on, there was a rhetorical commitment to liberal political ideas. The constitution of 1886 reaffirmed Liberal values by creating a secular state, providing for the popular election of municipal authorities, and protecting private property.[14] Elections helped create the façade ofdiberal democracy, though the actual practice was quite deficient. Erik Ching explains that elites developed sophisticated patronage networks at the municipal and national levels, which allowed them to subvert individual liberties for their own gain.[15] He describes these networks as "highly personalistic, typically hierarchical units designed to monopolize

voting, control public office, and militarily resist rival networks when necessary."[16] Political bosses bargained with voters for their votes, which were known because voting was conducted orally and in public until 1950. This bargaining enabled elites to use public offices for their own enrichment. Coffee growers occupied the presidency for seventeen years between 1856 and 1898, and eight of the ten presidents from 1898 to 1927 were from coffee families.[17] By 1895 well over 90 percent of the members in the Salvadoran legislature were coffee planters.[18] This dominance continued well into the twentieth century, as growers consolidated their hold on the state. One notable example was the Meléndez-Quiñónez family (1913–29), which used a combination of party patronage through the National Democratic Party (PND) coupled with a repressive intelligence apparatus known as the Ligas Rojas.

Coffee growers and producers used various instruments of the state to protect their own interests. The unpopularity of the land reforms, especially among the Indian communities, resulted in several revolts during the 1880s. Municipalities reacted by imposing a tax on coffee growers to fund the rural police (1884) and the mounted police (1889), which Robert Williams notes were "under the growers' direct control."[19] The desire to maintain order and stability in the countryside resulted in a close relationship between the landed elites and the military. For the oligarchy, stability was paramount to other freedoms commonly associated with liberal politics in the European tradition. The National Guard was established in 1912 and paid for by the coffee elite itself to maintain internal security by policing rural areas.[20] Peasant conscripts were also used throughout the countryside to maintain order and provide information on "suspicious" activities. The use of peasant conscripts also disrupted communal relations, further strengthening the oligarchy.[21] By 1930 much of the Salvadoran countryside was under military control.[22] Thus, the Liberals' proclamations of democracy were undermined by authoritarian tendencies.

The coffee elites were also responsible for the growth of the financial and commercial industries.[23] The Salvadoran Coffee Association (ASCAFE), the organization of coffee growers, was formed in 1929 to consolidate elite interests.[24] The Cafetalera, as it came to be known, has been likened to a "second state" or an "invisible government, often making policy decisions associated with government bureaucracies."[25] As a result, coffee production continued to expand well into the twentieth century. From 1919 to 1932 the amount of land devoted to coffee cultivation grew from 70,000 to 106,000 hectares.[26]

By 1931 coffee accounted for 96 percent of El Salvador's exports.[27] This dependence left the country vulnerable to the Great Depression, during the first six months of which the price of coffee fell 45 percent; it would later tumble another 12 percent.[28] From 1930 to 1932, export earnings from coffee were cut in half, dropping from 34 million colones to 13 million colones.[29] Additionally, many of the smaller producers were driven out of business and the wealth from coffee became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a select few.[30] Smaller producers were unable to pay their debts to the banks and, as a result, several banks came to own portions of the coffee industry.[31]

La Matanza

Working conditions on coffee fincas deteriorated with the Depression. Income in 1931 was one-half that in 1928 and the daily wages of plantation workers were slashed in half, from 30 to 15 centavos.[32] Declining economic conditions resulted in increasing tensions throughout the countryside. Peasant uprisings, which had been sporadic throughout the countryside for the past century, were becoming more dangerous for elite interests.

President Pio Romero Bosque, a reformer who had been critical of the civil-rights violations of previous administrations, promoted labor unions and allowed competitive presidential elections. The growing strength of labor unions and peasant activism, coupled with the founding of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), in 1930, raised concerns among the elites. In 1931, Labor Party candidate Arturo Araujo, a sugar and coffee producer, was elected president. Araujo's campaign promised land reform and labor rights, both of which were in direct conflict with the interests of the coffee elites. In December 1931, Araujo was overthrown by the military and replaced by his vice president, Gen. Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. Tensions were exacerbated by the electoral fraud of the January 1932 municipal elections, in which the government suspended elections in strongholds of the PCS and refused to certify results in areas where the PCS claimed victory.[33] Days later a peasant uprising led by Communist Party founder Augustín Farabundo Martí would dramatically alter the future of El Salvador. The military acted swiftly and ruthlessly. In the end, as many as thirty thousand peasants, most of whom were not actual participants the rebellion, were dead, including Martí.[34] La Matanza (the Massacre), as it came to be known, resulted in the implementation of a military-oligarchy coalition that would rule El Salvador

for another five decades. Whether the threat of mass rebellion was real or perceived, the oligarchy reached an agreement with the military to maintain stability and protect elite economic interests. William Stanley suggests that the military may have exaggerated the extent of the "Communist threat" in order to gain control of the state apparatus.[35] Martínez, who initially had very little support among elites or the armed forces, consolidated power through the centralization of decision making, public works, and services; replacing civilians with officers at the municipal and local level; discouraging labor unions, and prohibiting peasant organizations.[36] Martínez also established the National Party of the Fatherland (Pro Patria), an extensive hierarchical party network, to guarantee his victory in the 1935 presidential and municipal elections. The party's success (and the consolidation of broader powers) relied on the incorporation of workers and peasants into the party's corporatist structure, offering modest protection from elites in exchange for support.[37]

Martínez and the coffee elites had differing interpretations of the causes of the 1932 rebellion. While Martínez seemed to have a general understanding of the structural causes of the rebellion, elites believed the uprising was the result of naïve peasants (mostly Indians) who were influenced by imported communism. They denied that there was any exploitation present, and argued that class stratification was an inevitable feature of any society.[38] The narrative developed by elites to explain the 1932 uprising shaped elite policy preferences and alliances for the next five decades—longer among some of the more recalcitrant elements. They viewed themselves the driving force behind El Salvador's development, nationalists threatened by nefarious communist forces.[39] Thus, while elites disagreed with Martínez's social reforms, they were willing to support him (at least initially) because they approved of his crushing response to the massacre and economic policies in the midst of the Great Depression. The development of what Stanley describes as "quasi-statal financial institutions" during the period demonstrates the depth of the relationship between the state and coffee elites.[40] The Central Bank and Banco Hipotecario, an agricultural bank, were established in 1934, and the Salvadoran Coffee Company (Compañía Salvadoreña de Café) was established in 1942 to provide loans and regulate coffee prices. The relationship between the banking and coffee sectors was rather incestuous—the Cafetelera owned 75 percent of Hipotacario.[41]

Martínez was overthrown in 1944 for attempting to seek a third term in office and was succeeded by Gen. Salvador Castañeda Castro in May 1945.[42]

Castañeda Castro represented the old guard of the Salvadoran armed forces and was relatively isolated from the junior officers. In an attempt to keep the junior officers in check and reduce the possibility of another coup, he sent many overseas for further military training.[43] Those officers returned in 1948, on the eve of a hastily arranged presidential election. When Castañeda Castro attempted to extend his term as president, he was summarily overthrown in what was referred to as the 1948 "revolution."[44] The 1948 coup summarily ended the caudillo state in El Salvador and paved the way for significant institutional change.

Institutional Military Rule

For nearly a century, elites had maintained power through coercive mechanisms designed to protect them from the socioeconomic exclusion produced by their policies. By the mid-nineteenth century, cracks were beginning to emerge in the model. The 1948 "revolution," which effectively ended caudillo rule, was primarily the result of a fissure between junior officers and older generals.[45] Junior officers were mostly of working-class backgrounds who did not benefit from the spoils system that had enriched the generals.[46] Because of their socioeconomic background, junior officers tended to favor policies that benefited the poor.[47] This is not to suggest that their beliefs were entirely altruistic. While some junior officers favored reforms on their own merit, others simply believed them necessary to ensure political stability.[48] They agreed, however, on the importance of democratic governance and economic reform for creating growth and stability.[49] The Revolutionary Council of Government, composed of three military and two civilian representatives, sought to institutionalize democracy and modernize the Salvadoran state. The platform of the Revolutionary Council was embodied in the "fourteen points," a platform expressing a commitment to a democratic regime with free and fair elections, a professionalized military, and universal suffrage.[50] Despite the noted commitment to democracy, the Revolutionary Council banned political parties affiliated with religious groups, those receiving foreign aid, and the Communist Party. The economic components of the platform focused on increased social services and, more significantly, increased state intervention in the economy to promote industrialization.[51]

The period from 1948 through 1979 is punctuated by a succession of reformist coups encouraging political liberalization followed by increasingly

repressive coups.[52] Philip J. Williams and Knut Walter describe this phenomenon as "a state of continuous tension between those lines of thought that would try to prevent crisis by promoting change of varying degrees and those who would seek to prevent even expressions of the need for change."[53] While regime change during this period was frequent (sixteen different governments between 1944 and 1979), there are certain characteristics that define this period as a whole. First, the regime type is best described as a procedural democracy in which the military held elections and ruled through official parties.[54] With the exception of the PCS, the party system in El Salvador was developed after Martínez's departure and was used to consolidate the oligarchy's rule through "official" military parties, such as the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification (PRUD). Elections were frequently organized around "mini-parties" created to promote various candidates representative of the different strains of thought within the military.[55] Much like their predecessors, political parties of this era were ill-equipped, at best, to perform the typical functions of a party system—channeling the demands of the population—and, in fact, functioned solely for the purpose of elections. To that end, the party system merely served as a means by which the oligarchy could reassert its control through military regimes. In fact, despite encouraging opposition parties to participate, from 1952 to 1961 the opposition never held a seat in the Legislative Assembly.[56] Second, these regimes often pledged varying degrees of socioeconomic reform, though never enough to redress the country's inequalities or affect the interests of the oligarchy. Finally, when liberalization went too far—that is, encroached upon the interests of the oligarchy—repression increased and the state used force to maintain order.[57]

Mobilization and Electoral Competition

The 1960s in El Salvador witnessed unprecedented political and economic change. The decade was characterized by relatively competitive elections, albeit far from open, and the growth of popular organizations, including Christian base communities (CEB), unions, and other popular organizations. The opening of political space, however limited, was accompanied by changing economic policy and respectable levels of growth. By the mid-1970s, however, this political opening would give way to repression, and the fallacy behind economic growth was revealed.

The political system opened significantly in the 1960s. Following a reformist coup—and three months later, a countercoup in late 1960 and early 1961—the PRUD reorganized itself to create the National Conciliation Party (PCN), modeled after the PRI in Mexico, in anticipation of the 1962 elections.[58] Opposition parties, including the newly formed Christian Democratic Party (PDC), abstained from participating in those elections due to questionable behavior by the PCN. After soundly defeating a donkey—the only opposition candidate—in the 1962 presidential elections, PCN president Julio Adalberto Rivera called for open elections and established a system of proportional representation.[59] As such, opposition parties were allowed to participate in the 1964 municipal elections. The PDC fared well and even won the mayoral race in San Salvador. The PDC emerged as a significant opposition force during the 1960s, more than doubling the number of municipalities it controlled from 1964 to 1966 (37 to 83). Much of this success can be attributed to the PDC's emphasis on developing a relationship with the working class. During his tenure as mayor of San Salvador, José Napoleón Duarte developed Acción Comunitaria, a neighborhood action program that encouraged community development.[60] This strategy of developing a middle-class and urban working class–constituency also benefited the PDC in the 1967 presidential elections. While the PCN won handily, the PDC garnered 21.6 percent of the vote.[61] In Salvadoran terms, the PDC was becoming a well-organized opposition party.

The period from 1972 to 1979 was a major turning point in Salvadoran politics. Throughout the 1960s the military government had permitted the participation of opposition political parties, such as the PDC, and had even tolerated their expansion. By the early 1970s, however, the increasing success of the opposition became too close for comfort. The rise of the PDC was also accompanied by increasing mobilization among labor, peasant organizations, and Christian base communities, which made the military increasingly nervous. Rather than permit the further expansion of the opposition, the military regime sought to diminish the power of the opposition, first through electoral fraud and later through repression. This seizure of political space resulted in a severe deterioration of the sociopolitical environment and eventually led to the breakdown of Salvadoran society as a whole.

In September 1971 the PDC joined a coalition with two other left-wing parties, the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN). Together the three parties formed the National

Opposition Union (UNO) to participate in the 1972 elections, selecting José Napoleón Duarte, the popular mayor of San Salvador, as their presidential candidate. Even though Duarte was leading in the polls when radio election coverage was terminated, the final tally favored the PCN. According to official reports, the PCN won 334,600 votes to UNO's 324,756, while UNO's tally attributed 317,535 to the PCN and 326, 968 votes to UNO.[62] Protests followed and attempts were made to nullify the election. In the end, PCN candidate Col. Arturo Molina assumed the presidency and Duarte was forced into exile.

The 1972 presidential elections were a critical juncture in Salvadoran politics. For more than a decade, various regimes had tolerated the growth of the PDC and other opposition parties, and the opposition had shown its growing organizational and electoral capacity. The growth and success of the PDC and other opposition parties was alarming to elites, who feared that a win by the opposition would result in land reform and threaten their very livelihood.[63] The victory of Marxist Popular Unity presidential candidate, Salvador Allende, in Chile following a Christian Democratic president, fueled fears among the Salvadoran elites and the more conservative members of the military that a victory by the PDC would "serve as a bridge for the left to take power."[64] Thus, while the Salvadoran Christian Democrats served a valuable role in legitimizing the electoral process, they were not allowed to ascend to power. The 1972 elections demonstrated that reform through elections was unattainable.[65] It was in this environment that popular mobilization and repression intensified.

Repression as a Response to Mobilization

Popular mobilization and repression intensified following the 1972 elections. While anticommunist military and paramilitary organizations were not new to El Salvador, their activities increased significantly following the 1972 elections. The Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN) was formed in 1966 by the military for thwarting communism by way of indoctrination—or murder, if deemed necessary. ORDEN soon was followed by the emergence of more ruthless and ubiquitous "death squads." By 1975 paramilitary organizations and death squads, such as the Anticommunist Wars of Elimination Liberation Armed Forces (FALANGE) and Mano Blanca (White Hand), patrolled the countryside with the explicit goal of exterminating

"communists," whether they were priests, students, union leaders, peasants, or progressive politicians.[66] Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson, former chief of intelligence, was instrumental in the development of these groups. D'Aubuisson was the head of the White Warriors' Union (Unión Guerrera Blanca), a death squad that targeted priests. His relationship with a group of wealthy businessmen, collectively known as the Broad Nationalist Front (FAN), ensured their financing.[67] The motto "Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest," was more than just bravado. D'Aubuisson's group threatened to kill forty-six Jesuits unless they left the country. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, priests and layworkers were increasingly the victims of death squads. The assassination of Father Rutilio Grande of Aguilares, in March 1977, just one month after the elections, was intended to deliver a clear message to the church about its "political activism."

The 1977 presidential election took place amid increasing protest and social violence. Throughout the 1970s, both sides had become increasingly radicalized. The 1977 elections were further testament that reform via elections did not exist. The electoral fraud of 1972 was repeated in 1977 when PCN candidate Carlos Humberto Romero defeated the UNO candidate, retired Col. Ernesto Claramount. Not surprisingly, voting irregularities were rampant. To protest, Claramount and his supporters (a crowd that grew to fifty thousand in a few days) gathered in the Plaza Libertad in San Salvador. National police opened fire on the crowd, killing dozens.[68] Claramount fled into exile and Romero assumed the presidency, as planned. While the 1977 election results merely reinforced the fraud of the 1972 elections, the ending was a decidedly more violent demonstration of what was to come.

Descent into War

In October 1979 junior officers of the armed forces carried out a reformist coup against the Romero government. The first junta consisted of two officers and three civilians; members of the political opposition served in various administrative positions. The objectives of the junta included support for the fundamental elements of citizen participation, guarantees of human rights, dissolution of ORDEN and other death squads, and the more equitable distribution of economic resources.[69] In short, the intended goal of the coup was to establish an environment for free elections by curtailing violence and providing an agrarian reform program aimed at easing tensions

created by the inequitable distribution of wealth and land. Ultimately, the coup failed to redefine the role of the military vis-à-vis the state, and the oligarchy remained in control of the economy.[70]

The reforms proposed by the junta included agrarian reform and the nationalization of the banks and the coffee sector. In December 1979 the junta passed Decree 75, which nationalized the coffee export process and created the National Coffee Institute (INCAFE) to manage those exports.[71] Elites viewed these programs as radical and interpreted them and the mass mobilization of the 1970s through the lens of the 1932 uprising. The solution was to unleash a repressive response akin to La Matanza, relying on increasing, albeit inconsistent, levels of violence.[72] The first junta collapsed in January 1980 when the three civilian members of the junta resigned to protest the violence. Under pressure from the United States, the military extended junta leadership to the PDC in January 1980, a tactical move to ensure legitimacy at home and military funds from the United States. The PDC agreed to join the junta on the condition that human rights violations would lessen and that the reforms proffered by the junta, including agrarian reform, would proceed. As a result, José Napoleón Duarte, who had been denied the presidency eight years earlier, joined the junta and became its president in December 1980.

Rather than subside, however, the levels of violence increased. Death squads and right-wing paramilitary groups began "disappearing"[73] those associated with labor unions, peasant groups, the church, and students. Between 1980 and 1982, approximately forty-two thousand people were killed by police, military, and paramilitary death squads.[74] More than thirteen thousand people were murdered or disappeared in 1980 alone, most of them peasants, workers, and students.[75] Innocent civilians, including children, were frequently caught in the military's "low-intensity," counterinsurgency strategy. Numerous massacres of civilians, including those at the Sumpul River, El Mozote, the Lempa River, El Calabozo, and the Gualsinga River, demonstrated the brutality of government forces. At El Mozote, more than seven hundred unarmed civilians, including infants and children, were summarily executed.[76] One of the most frequent perpetrators of the massacres was the "elite" U.S.-trained Atlacatl Batallion, which was widely regarded as "the most efficient killing machine that the Salvadoran army had to offer."[77]

A series of high-profile assassinations in 1980 effectively ended any prospect for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo

Romero was assassinated while celebrating mass on March 24, 1980. Although initially thought to be a conservative Vatican appointment, Romero was radicalized by the overwhelming violence in El Salvador, particularly the attacks on priests and the murder of his good friend Rutilio Grande. During the three years that Romero was the archbishop of San Salvador, he implored government forces, paramilitary death squads, and revolutionaries to lay down their weapons. His powerful sermons on themes of social justice, impunity, repression, and poverty made him the "voice of the voiceless." They also made him a threat to elites. The month before his assassination, Romero wrote a letter to U.S. president Jimmy Carter asking him to prohibit military aid. So compelling was his presence that many combatants would later say that his assassination drove them to join the revolution.[78] Six leaders of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), including the organization's president, Enrique Álvarez Córdova, were abducted, tortured, and murdered in November 1980 by security forces as they gathered for a press conference.[79] The remaining leadership was forced into exile. Weeks later, in December 1980, three American nuns and a layworker were abducted, raped, and murdered by members of the National Guard. Three days later the bodies of Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan, who served as a pallbearer at Romero's funeral, were found buried in a single shallow grave. These deaths shocked Salvadorans and the international community and convinced many that the space for political settlements had closed.

With all avenues for nonviolent protest eliminated, increasing repression drove once divided opposition groups together. The Democratic Revolutionary Front was established in April 1980 by three center-left parties, members of which had participated in the junta. During the summer of 1980 the FDR organized several general strikes designed to demonstrate the popular support for the group.[80] The public nature of the FDR's activities naturally drew the attention of the military. The murders of one organization's leadership later that year had a dramatic impact on the group's organizational capacity within the country. The FDR gained international prominence through the establishment of diplomatic missions abroad and was recognized as the Salvadoran representative to the Socialist International. In 1981 the FDR was recognized by the governments of France and Mexico as a "representative political force."[81] In October 1980 five guerrilla organizations formed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).[82] The FDR, which

had an open alliance with the FMLN's predecessor, the United Revolutionary Directorate (DRU), then aligned with the FMLN.[83] The polarizing events and heightened repression of 1979–82 provided ample opportunity for recruitment. The FMLN peaked in 1983 with some twelve thousand troops, making it one of the largest, most disciplined guerrilla movements in the hemisphere. Almost one-third of FMLN combatants and 20 percent of commanders were women. The FMLN derived much of its strength from the grassroots and peasant organizations, both in terms of recruitment and general support.

U.S. Policy and the Emergence of ARENA

U.S. interest in El Salvador, which had been fairly negligible compared to other countries in the region before 1979, rose sharply with the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the emergence of the FMLN. The goal of the Carter administration was to prevent the accession of a leftist regime in El Salvador while promoting human rights, a policy it sought to promote throughout Latin America. Believing that the 1979 junta offered the best solution to the political violence, the Carter administration approved the reprogramming of $5.7 million in nonlethal military aid to the junta in March 1980.[84] In an effort to support the junta and diminish support for the guerrillas, the administration developed a policy that included agrarian reform and the nationalization of banks and coffee.[85] These policies, which many elites characterized as socialist, were deeply at odds with the interests of most elites and their policy preferences at the time. Despite efforts by some in the Carter administration to tie human rights to aid, abuses increased and aid continued to flow in an effort to combat the encroaching "communist threat" posed by the FMLN rebels.[86]

But elites found a much more suitable partner in the Reagan administration.[87] The attitudes and policy preference of hardliners within the administration coincided with those of El Salvador's elites. Salvadoran elites and the military successfully resurrected the 1932 narrative, which was also echoed by the administration: the situation in El Salvador was the result of Soviet encroachment into the hemisphere and a consequence of Carter's permissive policy environment in the region.[88] The FMLN's failed January 1981 offensive fueled speculation in Washington that the guerrillas were receiving significant assistance from Cuba and Nicaragua.[89] The Reagan administration,

eager to use El Salvador as a showcase in its efforts to combat communism in the hemisphere, developed a strategy to undercut support for the guerrillas while also supporting democracy.[90] The Reagan Doctrine, as it came to be known, and the fear of communist expansion in the hemisphere dominated U.S. policy in the region for almost a decade.[91]

The dominant narrative about the FMLN's military weakness and lack of popular appeal undermined attempts for political resolution of the conflict throughout the decade. The military, many elites, and the Reagan administration believed that the FMLN could be defeated on the battlefield. During the 1980s the United States spent $4.35 billion, $1.035 billion of that in military aid, to defeat the FMLN.[92] As a result, there was little support for a negotiated end to the conflict during much of the 1980s. Failed talks between the Duarte administration and FDR-FMLN at La Palma, Chalatenango, in October 1984, Ayagualo in November 1984, and numerous overtures in 1985–86 received no support from the military or the Reagan administration.

While the support of a military victory was clearly one of the defining features of Reagan's policy, elections were paramount for achieving the administration's overall goal. Not only would elections provide legitimacy for the Salvadoran government and guarantee continued aid from a highly critical, Democrat-controlled Congress, but they would also undermine guerrilla efforts by providing a democratic alternative.[93] Elections were held in 1982 for a Constituent Assembly, which would, in turn, elect a provisional president and replace the junta. The primary goal of the assembly was to draft a new constitution to create a new framework for a more inclusive electoral democracy. These elections, and the subsequent elections in 1984, were touted as "free elections" by the United States despite obvious deficiencies—not the least of which was that they were held against the backdrop of the war.[94] Seven parties registered with the new Central Elections Council (CCE), including the PCN and the PDC.

In 1981 a new party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), emerged as the political expression of right-wing extremism. In some respects, ARENA mirrored past patronage party networks, combining repression with tightly controlled political participation. The party grew out of FAN, uniting the oligarchy, military, and death squads in the anticommunist cause. The ORDEN organizational network served as the "foundation" for the party.[95] Among the party's founders was former intelligence chief Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson, who combined ultranationalist and anticommunist