

THIRTY YEARS OF  
TRANSFORMATION IN THE  
AGRARIAN STRUCTURE OF  
EL SALVADOR, 1961–1991\*

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Inequality in the distribution of land has long been viewed as the social dynamite that has set off many peasant uprisings in the twentieth century. The most extensive study to date of modern guerrilla wars in Latin America, by Timothy Wickham-Crowley, found land tenure and the overall agrarian structure to be a common element in upheaval in Cuba, Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (Wickham-Crowley 1992, 306–7). Samuel Huntington's classic book on development and stability articulated the explanation for these agrarian insurrections: "Where the conditions of landownership are equitable and provide a viable living for the peasant, revolution is unlikely. Where they are inequitable and where the peasant lives in poverty and suffering, revolution is likely, if not inevitable, unless the government takes prompt measures to remedy these conditions" (Huntington 1968, 375).<sup>1</sup>

\*I would like to thank the director of the Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples (EHPM) at the Salvadoran Ministerio de Planificación (MIPLAN), Mauricio Alens, who provided assistance and access to the data set. Daniel Flores de Paz of MIPLAN explained the sample frame and the methodology used for the expansion factors in the study. I am especially grateful to Juan Carlos Valdés of the computer center at MIPLAN, who converted the data set into a format compatible with the SPSS/PC program. This study grew out of research undertaken for USAID (contracted to Abt Associates), in which I was chief of party. The study reporting that effort (Seligson, Thiesenhusen, Childress, and Vidales 1993), however, focused exclusively on the EHPM and made no comparisons with earlier census data. Michael Wise of USAID El Salvador, Luis López Córdovez of the Food and Agriculture Organization, and Mark Wenner of Abt Associates commented extensively on earlier drafts. I also wish to thank Malcolm Childress, Don Jackson, and William Thiesenhusen of the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin for helpful comments on the research effort as it was evolving. Graduate students in my course on revolution made several helpful comments, especially Rafael Antonio Pléitez Chávez, who offered an extensive critique. John Booth, Mac Chapin, Billie De Walt, Jack Hammond, Marc Edelman, and Mark Ruhl commented on an earlier draft. Finally, Elizabeth Jean Wood, Harvard University, and John Strasma of the Land Tenure Center provided critical comments that improved the final version.

1. Prosterman and Riedenger explain the connection this way: "Land is the chief source of livelihood, security and status for most people in the less developed countries. . . . Thus,

The civil war that began in El Salvador in the late 1970s appeared to many observers to be a textbook case of agrarian insurrection (see Durham 1979; Midlarsky and Roberts 1985; North 1985; Williams 1986; Mason 1986; Paige 1987; Brockett 1988; Paige 1993). Other studies of the war have emphasized a variety of factors that help explain the magnitude and course of the insurrection: the role of external actors, especially Nicaragua, Cuba, and the United States (Schwarz 1991); the particular characteristics of the Salvadoran military (Véjar 1980; Baloyra 1982); and the composition and interests of the coffee elite (Stone 1990; Paige 1993). But even the Kissinger Commission, which stressed the role of communist infiltration in instability in Central America, did not deny the significance of the land issue as a major underlying cause of the war (U.S. National Bipartisan Commission 1984, 21–23, 34, 61, 69).

Central to the view that agrarian inequality was associated with the outbreak of the civil war in El Salvador is the frequently cited statistic that the landless as a proportion of the total national population was one of the highest of any country in Latin America (Prosterman and Riedinger 1987, 143). In addition, El Salvador's tiny size, large rural population, and concentration of land in the hands of a small number of large coffee and cotton growers had resulted in tiny plots for peasants who had any land. Moreover, many among the landholding peasants were not owners but tenants who merely worked the land. All studies have noted El Salvador's high population density (which exceeds that of India) and extreme concentration in land distribution (with a GINI coefficient of 83, among the five highest in the world),<sup>2</sup> and they have associated these conditions with the outbreak of the war. In short, these studies concur that landless, land-poor, and tenant populations predominating in rural El Salvador provided ideal conditions for insurrection.

In 1992 an agreement was reached to end the civil war (see United Nations 1992). Since that time, the guerrillas have laid down their arms, and the government has reduced the size of its armed forces and demobilized the most infamous military units accused of human rights abuses. Equally important, the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) has been legalized as a political party and put up candidates for local and national offices in the 1994 elections. Numerous other key reforms have been accomplished or are underway, including creation of a civilian-controlled national police force, cleansing of the army of noto-

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it should not be surprising that in many societies the principal subject of grievances and the principal occasion for blame should be land-related; specifically, that a very high proportion of the most violent twentieth-century civil conflicts should have occurred in situations where a substantial percentage of the population were blocked, by human agents, from having a secure and remunerative relation with the land they tilled" (Prosterman and Riedinger 1987, 10).

2. According to the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, the highest land GINI coefficient for the 1970s was that of Venezuela, at 90.9 (Taylor and Jodice 1983, 140–41).

rious human rights violators, designing of a new agrarian code, and implementation of several land-reform measures.<sup>3</sup>

If defects in the agrarian structure were central causes of the Salvadoran civil war, the long-term stability of the peace should depend to a significant degree on ameliorating those defects. To pose the question more specifically, if the predominance of landless, land-poor, and tenant populations in the countryside caused the civil war, to what extent have these groups declined in absolute and relative terms?

Until now, scholars and policymakers have been unable to give any empirically based answer to this question largely because the last agricultural census in El Salvador was conducted in 1971, eight years before the civil war broke out. That census provided a reasonable database for estimating the parameters of the agrarian structure prior to the civil war, but the lack of a census since 1971 has precluded examining the changes that occurred in the decade before the war and those brought about by agrarian reform and the war since 1980.

The absence of a solid basis for scholars to draw conclusions and for policymakers to formulate policy has not, however, stopped either group. Scores of publications have made all kinds of claims about the agrarian structure of El Salvador, despite little empirical evidence to back them. Policymakers, for their part, were compelled by the geopolitical imperatives of the 1980s (when leftist strength was perceived as growing throughout Central America) to support a wide-ranging land reform in El Salvador. It is particularly disturbing that so much of the Salvadoran land reform (and U.S. support for it) was based on highly contradictory and sometimes obviously flawed "scholarly" estimates of the agrarian structure of El Salvador. This article seeks to fill in the lacunae in knowledge about the agrarian structure of El Salvador by analyzing a large new database that, while less comprehensive than a census, actually offers several advantages over census data in linking Salvadorans to land.

#### CONTRADICTIONARY PORTRAYALS OF THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE BEFORE THE WAR

The primary goal of this article is to determine the extent to which the agrarian structure of El Salvador remains a fundamental national problem or has diminished in importance as a result of land reform and other factors. This aim requires establishing a baseline picture of the agrarian structure of the country before the outbreak of the civil war. Unfortunately, although a great deal has been written about the agrarian structure of El Salvador prior to the war, much of the underlying research has been anything but careful. Moreover, early inaccurate reports have

3. For an overview of the steps required in the peace process and their dates of implementation, see Vickers and Spence (1992).

been relied on extensively by subsequent studies, thus perpetuating the errors and leading to unjustified confidence in the similarity of the estimates.

Consider the influential 1981 Oxfam America "Impact Audit," a document cited frequently by numerous subsequent studies, referenced in U.S. Congressional testimony, and used to justify the demand for land reform by countless groups inside and outside El Salvador. Oxfam America claimed that "65 percent of the population is landless" (Simon 1982, 1). The text did not specify, however, whether this group was 65 percent of the entire population, the economically active population, the rural population, or the agricultural population. Examination of the relevant note in that monograph reveals a 1976 source based on preliminary tabulations of the 1971 agricultural census (see Burke 1976). Although the 1971 census had been available in definitive form since 1975, the Oxfam report relied instead on an article using the preliminary census report. As it turns out, the preliminary tabulations varied little from the definitive ones and would not have caused major changes in the conclusions of the publication cited by Oxfam. Far more serious is the finding in the 1976 source that 29 percent of rural families were landless, not the 65 percent of the population, rural or national, claimed by Oxfam (see Burke 1976, 476). Perhaps Oxfam was referring instead to a second estimate provided in the 1976 source, based on a 1976 UN publication in which the landless population was found to have skyrocketed in only four years to 41 percent (an increase probably resulting more from the UN estimation technique than from an actual increase of that magnitude in the landless population). In any event, the higher UN estimate was still far below the one provided in the Oxfam report. Subsequent researchers have returned repeatedly to the Oxfam and Burke studies, apparently without consulting the original census material (Ruhl 1984, 47; North 1985, 48).<sup>4</sup>

Closer examination of the 1971 estimates of landlessness reveals two serious flaws, one a major overestimate and the other a major underestimate. The overestimation flaw appears when the landless are calculated by subtracting the number of farms from the total number of rural families. The assumption made was that all those who have no land ought to be classified as landless peasants. In purely technical terms, this is true, but these "landless peasants" include all those with steady rural jobs as well as those who work on their parents' land as family laborers. Such an overestimate makes the situation appear as if all these so-called landless peasants would be eligible for and interested in land provided by a land-reform program. In fact, many of those with steady jobs on plantations would not be willing to assume the risks inherent in starting a

4. Ruhl acknowledges in a footnote that the landless figures may be exaggerated (1984, n. 14).

farm of their own, while family laborers are mostly young unmarried children of farmers who may eventually inherit their parents' land. Furthermore, if all these so-called landless were suddenly granted land, many agricultural enterprises would have to close down for lack of a labor supply, while small farmers deprived of family labor would be unable to operate their own farms. It makes far more sense to recognize that the landless farm population should be divided into subcategories: wage laborers with steady jobs, family laborers, and those who have neither land nor steady wage-labor jobs and are therefore truly landless laborers.

The second flaw in the 1971 landless estimates produced a gross underestimate because such estimates were based on the number of families rather than on the economically active population. For example, the 1961 census reported 115,161 landless workers, 51,498 permanent wage workers, and 34,926 family laborers, whereas Burke reported a total of 30,451 landless families (1976, 476).

Further confusion has been added to the picture by Roy Prosterman (in Prosterman 1976; Prosterman and Riedinger 1982, 1987), whose influential reports for USAID enabled him to shape the "land-to-the-tiller" legislation (the third phase) of the Salvadoran land reform of 1980. Prosterman argued for the link between land inequality and violence throughout the world, especially in El Salvador. His concern therefore focused on the impact of landlessness on the overall national population. But his logic led him to include tenants in the landless category, even though these individuals have access to land, and to exclude the land-poor.<sup>5</sup> Prosterman's calculations show that in 1979, agricultural laborers plus tenants totaled 30 to 37 percent of all families (Prosterman and Riedinger 1987, 26).

Other estimates vary dramatically, confusing matters further.<sup>6</sup> One

5. Jeffrey Riedinger, Prosterman's coauthor, agreed in personal communications with me that the land-poor, if properly defined, should not be excluded from future estimates.

6. The most frequently cited study, the so-called McReynolds Report (McReynolds et al. 1989), combines five data sources: three surveys conducted in 1987–1988 by PERA (Proyecto Planificación y Evaluación de la Reforma Agraria) with a sample size of 2,694; a small survey of renters conducted by CLUSA (Cooperative League of the United States of America); and the 1971 Salvadoran census of agriculture. While this impressive effort contains a great deal of valuable information on land tenure and agriculture in general, the McReynolds sampling frame was the farm rather than the household, and thus it cannot provide a reliable estimate of landless and unemployed populations. Moreover, the PERA sampling frame was based entirely on cadastral lists compiled by the Instituto Geográfico Nacional, and their accuracy and currency have not been assessed. Another impressive effort, the "Gore Report" (Gore, McReynolds, and Johnston 1987) is based on a restudy in 1987 of 789 households in rural El Salvador that were first interviewed in 1978. The sample frame utilized was that of the Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, the same one used in this article. That survey includes both landed and landless, but the sample's being limited to the segment of the population living in the same general area in 1987 as in 1978 creates several problems: it excludes those who migrated in the nine years elapsing between 1978

study based on UN data reports that 29 percent of rural families were landless in 1971, a segment that grew to 51 percent by 1980 (Ruben 1991, 15). According to a Cornell University project, 80 percent of rural Salvadoran households in 1971 were landless or near-landless (Esman 1978, 7).<sup>7</sup> The resulting range of estimates, nearly all presumably based on the same source (the 1971 census), present contradictory pictures of rural El Salvador. From this grab bag, policymakers and their critics seem to have picked whichever estimate suited their preferences best. This article will take a fresh look at the old data after introducing a newer and more comprehensive database for the contemporary period.

#### A NEW DATABASE

Although a new population census was undertaken in 1992, it is of limited use in determining the degree of landlessness in El Salvador for two reasons. First, the population census has not yet been tabulated and probably will not be available in complete form for another two years.<sup>8</sup> Second and more important for the long term, the population census alone does not contain sufficient information to make a reasonable estimate of landlessness in El Salvador because it asked no questions regarding landownership.<sup>9</sup> To determine the employment and land-tenure status of the Salvadoran agricultural population, censuses are needed on both population and agriculture. Such censuses would have to be linked to make it possible to distinguish among various combinations of agricultural work and landownership. Unfortunately, the next agricultural census has been repeatedly postponed, and linking that census back to the population census will be difficult if not impossible.

Fortunately, a new database has become available in El Salvador that provides information similar to what would have been obtained had the population and agricultural censuses been conducted at the same time and linked via a common identification code for each respondent and farm. Since 1985, the Departamento de Investigaciones Muestrales of the Ministerio de Planificación (MIPLAN) has regularly conducted the Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples (EHPM). The first study

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and 1987. It also excludes younger families (those that had not formed by 1978). Hence the Gore sample represents an older and more stable than average component of the rural population.

7. Another more recent study is based on a sample so small that its reliability is seriously questionable. The sample size was 162 individuals distributed across seven of the fourteen Salvadoran departments (Morales Velado 1992).

8. Estimations of the number of males and females based on a small sample of the census have been released, but computerization of the entire census was not complete as of early 1995.

9. See the "Boleta censal" for the "Censos Nacionales V de Población y IV de Vivienda," to be published by the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, Ministerio de Economía, San Salvador.

was national in scope, but it had numerous flaws (many caused by the war) and is not considered reliable by MIPLAN. In 1986 the study was limited to the metropolitan area of San Salvador and thus provided no information on land tenure. Between 1988 and 1990–1991, the study was expanded to include all of urban El Salvador. Finally, between October 1991 and April 1992, the first reliable nationwide EHPM was undertaken. The total number of households visited increased from 7,000 in previous years to 20,000; and for each household, extensive employment information was recorded about all individuals ten years of age and older. That survey is the one relied on throughout this article.<sup>10</sup>

The survey data were made available to me in raw form. They were then entered into SPSS/PC format and processed. It should be emphasized that the Ministerio de Planificación in El Salvador has not written its own report on the agrarian structure of the country using this data set, although technicians within the ministry have been shown various drafts of this article and have commented on its findings.

The sample design utilized five strata, each representing one of the five regions into which the country is divided for planning purposes. Each stratum had a sample size of 4,000, divided into urban and rural components. Criteria of probability proportional to size were used in each stratum to draw the sample. Within each region, the sample was self-weighting. Expansion factors were employed to convert the sample numbers into numbers reflecting the overall population of El Salvador. Non-response accounted for approximately 18 percent, a level well within the normal nonresponse range and low considering that the civil war was lingering on at the time the survey was taken.<sup>11</sup>

Despite its obvious advantages over other sources of data, the EHPM survey is not perfect. Concerns about interviewers' safety during the war caused exclusion of 40 of El Salvador's 262 municipalities. In the omitted areas, the FMLN presented a serious military threat or had complete control. The 1971 census counted a total of 273,365 persons in these municipalities (8.2 percent of the population).<sup>12</sup> When the 1992 municipal

10. Information about all members of the household was taken, including data on sex, age, and educational achievement. Employment data were recorded for all individuals ten years of age and older.

11. Unfortunately, MIPLAN did not provide any information regarding the characteristics of the nonrespondents.

12. The areas were widely dispersed throughout the country and included a wide range of land-tenure conditions. The excluded areas are Chalatenango (Arcatao, San Isidro Labrador, Nueva Trinidad, Las Flores, Nombre de Jesús, San Antonio Los Ranchos, El Carrizal, San Antonio de la Cruz, Las Vueltas, Potonico, Cancasque, Ojos de Agua, and San Fernando); Cuscatlán (Tenancingo and Suchitoto); Cabañas (Cinquera) Usulután (Jucuarán and San Agustín); San Miguel (San Luis de la Reina, Carolina, Nuevo Edén de San Juan, San Gerardo, and San Antonio); Morazán (San Isidro, Gualococti, San Simón, Corinto, Jocoaitique, El Rosario, Joateca, Meanguera, Arambala, Perquín, San Fernando, and Torola); and La Unión (Meanguera del Golfo, Anamorós, Nueva Esparta, Polorós, and Lislique).

level census data are released, it will be possible to determine more precisely how large an impact this exclusion had on the 1991–1992 EHPM. It is unlikely, however, that the proportion of the population excluded from the EHPM increased significantly from those enumerated in the 1971 figures. Given historical trends toward urban migration and the rural exodus produced by the armed conflict, it is probable that the population in the areas excluded declined relative to the population of El Salvador as a whole. The World Bank reported that the Salvadoran population was 39 percent urban in 1965 but 44 percent urban by 1990 (1992, 278). Between 1980 and 1990, net international migration produced a negative balance of 594,415.<sup>13</sup>

In Chalatenango and Morazán, two departments heavily affected by the war and therefore undersampled in the MIPLAN survey, the population is estimated to have declined between 1971 and 1990 (El Salvador MIPLAN 1992). But in land-tenure patterns, these areas were not regions of unusually high landlessness before the war. For example, Wickham-Crowley reported 1971 census data showing that these two departments included only a modest number of landless laborers and a slightly higher number of landholders than most departments in the rest of the country (1992, 244). Consequently, their exclusion does not appear to have led to a gross distortion of the results presented here. Although it would have been ideal to learn more about the land-tenure patterns in the municipalities excluded from the MIPLAN survey, their small population relative to the rest of the country suggests that the results presented here would not be seriously altered if they had been included. In any event, the EHPM provides a more precise and current picture of the agrarian structure of El Salvador than has been available from any other source to date.

#### AGRARIAN STRUCTURE IN EL SALVADOR, 1991–1992

##### *Defining the Economically Active Agricultural Population*

Defining the landless population is not as easy as it might seem. The EHPM survey asked respondents a series of detailed questions on their employment status, sources of income, and access to land. These questions made it relatively easy to count those with access to land and those without it. First, however, it was necessary to determine the proportion of the population that was economically active and to define the

13. The migration data were taken from El Salvador MIPLAN and FUNAP (1986, 13). The previously cited PERA study concluded that the number of farms in El Salvador grew from 270,868 in the 1971 census to 286,183 in the 1987 sample survey, an increase of only 5.6 percent despite national population expansion by some 40 percent during this same period and growth of 114 percent in the department of San Salvador between 1971 and 1992. For population data, see El Salvador MIPLAN (1992, t. 10). For farm data, see El Salvador Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería, PERA (1989, 8).



subset of the population that works in agriculture. But to avoid exaggerating the problem of landlessness, it is necessary to exclude several groups from the count. MIPLAN included all those ten years of age and older in its classification as economically active, except for such categories as students, housewives, retirees, invalids, and prisoners.

My analysis raised the lower age cutoff to sixteen because it is unrealistic to expect young people to have farms of their own. In most cases, young people live at home with their families and have no immediate interest in acquiring their own farmland. In some instances, they may hope to inherit their parents' land; in others, they may marry and obtain land from their wives as part of a dowry. Mortality will also reduce the pool of young people. The point is that there is simply no way of knowing how many ten-year-olds will eventually end up as landless adults. Consequently, my analysis defines the landless and land-poor population more strictly by excluding all those younger than sixteen. By that age, many Salvadorans are moving toward marriageable age (or are already married or living in common-law unions) and are almost ready for independent households and income streams. Out of a total population of 5.2 million people in 1991–1992, 2.9 million were sixteen years of age and older.<sup>14</sup> Of this group, 1.6 million (56 percent) are economically active and employed. The unemployed will be dealt with in a separate calculation.<sup>15</sup>

A breakdown of the employed population by field of activity is contained in table 1. In 1991–1992, 33 percent of the employed economically active labor force over the age of sixteen worked in agriculture (544,099 persons).

Although these calculations isolate the agricultural population, not all economically active Salvadorans in the agricultural sector work the land. Some are professionals and technicians, others are administrators, and still others work in transportation. It would be inappropriate to categorize these persons as "landless" or "land-poor" merely because they work in the agricultural sector and have no access to land. The published census data do not allow for consideration of this nuance, but the MIPLAN survey does. The difference is minor, however, since it was found that 96.6 percent of those in the agricultural sector actually work in agricultural tasks, whereas the remainder work in administration, sales,

14. World Bank estimates show a somewhat lower figure of 2.7 million for Salvadorans between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four (1992, 268).

15. The United Nations reported that in 1985, the economically active population ten years and older accounted for 49 percent of the population in that age cohort (UN 1991). Although this estimate is lower than that made by the EHPM, individuals between the ages of ten and fifteen are far less likely to be part of the workforce, making the UN figures lower than the EHPM estimates. That is to say, if the UN estimate had been based on the more realistic age cutoff of sixteen years of age and older, the percentage of that group found to be economically active would have been higher than the UN estimate including those ten years of age and older.

TABLE 1 *Employed Economically Active Salvadoran Population, Sixteen Years of Age and Older*

<i>Field of Activity</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Agriculture	544,099	(33)
Services	336,344	(21)
Trade	291,665	(18)
Industry	290,883	(18)
Other	171,002	(10)
Total	1,633,993	(100)

Source: El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991–1992.

transportation, or other nonagricultural areas. This pruning process reduced the number of persons in agriculture to 523,368.

#### *Unemployed Agricultural Workers*

The data presented thus far have excluded persons classified as being in the agricultural sector who were not employed at the time of the survey. MIPLAN defines the employed population as those who worked during the week prior to the survey or did not work that week but were regularly employed. The remainder of the working-age population are considered unemployed.<sup>16</sup> This group consists of two categories of individuals: those who have passed retirement age (over sixty-five) but are still trying to find work, at least occasionally; and those who have not reached retirement age but are unemployed. The size of the unemployed group over sixty-five is small, only 1 percent of the total agricultural population (3,493 persons), and it does not materially affect the analysis. To avoid complicating the analysis, I included this small group in the calculations that follow (for more cautious estimates, 1 percent could be subtracted from those figures). The unemployed represent 10 percent of the agricultural-sector labor force (58,293 individuals).

#### *The Size of the Landless Population*

As noted, some studies exaggerate the magnitude of the landless agricultural population by characterizing all those who own no land as landless. Table 2 distinguishes among permanent and temporary day laborers by dividing the agricultural sector into seven subcategories. By

16. Underemployed individuals were classified as “temporary wage laborers.” To minimize the impact of seasonal fluctuations in labor demand, the MIPLAN survey was conducted over a six-month period, thereby capturing the high employment period during coffee harvest at the end of 1991 as well as the lower employment period in the first quarter of 1992.

TABLE 2 Occupations of the Salvadoran Population in the Agricultural Sector (Sixteen Years of Age and Older)

Occupations	Number	(%)
Temporary day laborers	169,432	(29)
Land-poor	85,361	(14)
Permanent day laborers	75,649	(13)
Small farmers and cooperative members	74,110	(13)
Unpaid family laborers	62,008	(11)
Unemployed	58,293	(10)
Farmers who employ laborers	56,808	(10)
Total	581,661	(100)

Source: El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991-1992

far the largest group are temporary day laborers, who account for 29 percent of the entire sector (169,432 persons). The next-largest group is the unemployed, 10 percent of the total (58,293 workers). Together, the unemployed and temporary workers add up to 39 percent of the entire agricultural-sector labor force (227,725 individuals). Permanent day workers comprise only 13 percent (75,649 workers).

The categorization scheme used to distinguish the landed from the landless forced a number of individuals into a single category when in fact some may really fit into two. For example, individuals may earn most of their income from wage labor, but they might also have some farmland or access to it as a secondary occupation. This subgroup represents about 11 percent of the permanent day laborers and about 8 percent of the temporary day laborers in El Salvador. All but a few of these workers have less than 1 *manzana* (0.7 hectare) of land and would be considered land-poor by any definition. The overlapping of categories produces a discrepancy of 1,010 in the number of landed individuals shown in table 2 (farmers, small farmers, and land-poor) versus table 3.

### *The Land-Poor Population*

Not all of those who have access to land, whether as owners or tenants, have enough land to sustain their families. In most writings on land tenure, such individuals are called "land-poor." The land-poor population in El Salvador is defined here as those farming less than 1 *manzana* (0.7 hectare) of land. While 1 *manzana* might seem like an unusually small amount of land to consider an individual as not being land-poor, in El Salvador it is a reasonable criterion for two reasons. First, if the cut-off were raised any higher, most farmers in El Salvador would be classified as land-poor. While that may indeed be the case when comparing El Salvador with countries better endowed with land resources, calling almost all those in El Salvador land-poor would not allow for making rele-

vant distinctions within the Salvadoran context. Second, analysis of the EHPM income data revealed that farmers who own 1 manzana or more of land earn incomes that match or exceed those who have steady jobs in the industrial sector. As a result, it is inappropriate to apply the term *poor* to those who earn more than many other gainfully employed Salvadorans. As defined here, the land-poor add up to 85,361 farmers, or 15 percent of the agricultural-sector population (see table 2).

*The Landed Population: Tenants versus Owners*

The landholding population (those having 1 manzana or more) has been divided into seven land-tenure categories in table 3.<sup>17</sup> Analysis of the EHPM data reveals a total of 217,289 individuals (37 percent) in the agricultural sector who have access to land.<sup>18</sup> Of those, 31.6 percent own land, an additional 10.8 percent have free use of land, and 5 percent belong to cooperatives that own land collectively.<sup>19</sup> The largest category is indirect ownership, with 44.2 percent renting, 4.9 percent sharecropping, and .9 percent working the land as *colonos*, a form of tenure that will

17. The calculation is based on land being worked by the farmer, not land owned. Although I would have preferred to know how much land each farmer owns, that question was not asked in the EHPM. In some cases, land owned is not being worked, and hence the figures for the landless and land-poor may overestimate this category. At the same time, this distortion is minimal for two reasons. First, land use in El Salvador is so intense that few farmers can afford to let any significant amount of land remain idle. Second, if a farmer is not working a portion of land owned, there are probably good reasons, likely because the land either is not arable or is being occupied by a building, a road, or other construction. For that reason, the category of "land worked" in a country like El Salvador probably provides a reliable estimate of the genuinely landed and landless populations.

18. Table 3 lists 217,289 farmers with access to land in El Salvador, but this total could be considered an underestimate because the study is based on those who work in the agricultural sector and therefore excludes all those occupied primarily in other sectors. Examination of the entire population of El Salvador, including all economic sectors, uncovered an additional 31,299 individuals who have access to land as a secondary occupation. About half of these (16,325) have access to less than 1 manzana of land. Hence the true number for individuals with access to land in El Salvador is much closer to 248,588 (217,289 in the agricultural sector plus 31,299 with a secondary occupation in agriculture). No attempt will be made to incorporate this group into the analysis, however, because the study focuses on Salvadorans who depend primarily on agriculture for a living.

19. The survey found only 10,040 persons in the agricultural sector who are mainly employed as cooperative members, although the various PERA surveys show some 30,000 members of Phase I cooperatives. Undercounting in this category resulted from sampling individuals living in concentrated areas but representing only a tiny fraction of the overall population. Cooperative members in El Salvador total less than 2 percent of the economically active agricultural population. In a survey designed to represent the entire population of the country, concentrated specialized groups will be undercounted because it is improbable that sufficient sampling points will fall within the limited areas where the cooperatives are located. Many more Salvadorans actually belong to cooperatives, including savings and loan cooperatives. MIPLAN, however, focused on distinguishing the nature of employment rather than on the various associations. In the present study, cooperative members are differentiated from those members who farm their own land, salaried workers, and other related subcategories.

TABLE 3 *Tenure Status of Population with Land in El Salvador, 1991–1992*

<i>Tenure Status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Renters	96,005	(44.2)
Fee-simple landowners	68,609	(31.6)
Farmers having free use of land	23,477	(10.8)
Sharecroppers	10,564	(4.9)
Cooperative members	10,040	(4.6)
Land promised to tenant	6,555	(3.0)
Colonos	2,039	(0.9)
Total landed	217,289	(100.0)

Source: El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991–1992

be explained subsequently. In all, these indirect forms of tenancy account for half of the 37 percent of Salvadoran farmers who have access to land.

Tenancy has often been considered to have various disadvantages when compared with landownership. First, rented land is often inferior in quality, being rented out by the owner because it is uneconomical to farm.<sup>20</sup> Second, insecure tenancy constrains farmers from investing in land, and hence infrastructure improvements and the planting of permanent crops may be less common among renters than among those having secure title to their land. Third, renters are far less likely to be able to obtain credit for their land because lenders often demand land titles as collateral for loans. Finally, renters are more likely to abuse the land they work, knowing that it is not theirs as a long-term trust. Hence they rarely employ soil conservation measures, and erosion takes its toll more rapidly.

Some analysts, however, have argued that tenancy also has its positive effects in creating a more fluid land market.<sup>21</sup> In El Salvador, the widespread employment of tenancy schemes merits close study because it not only is the predominant form of tenure but is also growing relative to ownership. Furthermore, tenancy historically has been much more common in El Salvador than in the other countries in Central America. Little research has been undertaken to date on the causes of widespread tenancy in El Salvador, although informed speculation holds that it was not common until after the liberal reforms of the 1880s, which outlawed communal forms of landownership (Browning 1971, 203–12). These reforms, which were designed to free up more land for coffee cultivation

20. Jeffery Riedinger told me of his finding that in the Philippines, higher quality land is rented out to help insure rental payment income for the owners. In El Salvador, however, it appears that the opposite is true, although no systematic evidence can be cited to support this claim.

21. For a careful discussion of the evidence pro and con, see Binswanger, Deininger, and Feder (1993, 55–62).

and other forms of agrarian capitalism, resulted in the rapid and massive loss of *ejido* and communal land controlled by indigenous communities. The *colonato* system, which apparently can be traced back to the colonial period, came into widespread use when Indians who had been forced off their lands became debt peons on landed estates (Browning 1971, 260). Colonos were granted usufruct rights to small plots. The colono system thus guaranteed landlords a supply of labor while reducing their wage-labor costs.<sup>22</sup> After the *colonato* system declined, it was eventually outlawed in 1980, and renting arrangements became a substitute for the old system.

Examination of the agricultural census data from 1950 to 1971 reveals strong evidence supporting the conclusion that renting and sharecropping served as functional surrogates for the *colonato* system. But because no agricultural census was taken before 1950 and the land registry contains little information on colono arrangements, it is very difficult to examine the growth of the *colonato* system itself prior to 1950.

The census in 1950 reported 32,945 renters (19 percent) and 33,384 colonos (also 19 percent) out of a total of 174,204 farms.<sup>23</sup> Thus colonos and renters represented 38 percent of all farms in 1950. By 1961 the number of renters had increased to 43,457 out of 226,896 farms (still 19 percent) (El Salvador Ministerio de Economía 1967). Colonos, in contrast, had increased to 55,769 (25 percent) of the total farms, and thus indirect tenancy now applied to 44 percent of all farms. The 1961 census introduced a combined category of renting plus ownership called "*propietario-arrendatario simple*" that accounted for an additional 29,805 farms. If these farms are added to the renters and colonos, then renting would seem to have increased to 57 percent of all farms, although overlap in the last category would result in some exaggeration of tenancy.

The major change showed up in 1971, when the census reported 270,868 farms, of which only 17,018 (6 percent) were worked by colonos. This sharp decline was attributed by the census bureau to the 1962 minimum wage law, which forced landlords using colonos to shift to a cash-based renting system (El Salvador Ministerio de Economía 1954, xxii). David Browning argued that 1965 minimum-wage laws abolished both the colono and sharecropping systems (1971, 261). Renters had increased to 76,256, not counting an additional 4,408 plots that were rented with a promise of sale and a mixed category of renting combined with free use.

22. The colono system was regulated by the Ley Agraria of 1942. Article 205 specified several obligations of the owner, including providing terms in a formal contract, suitable and clean housing, and food and medicine as well as allowing the colono to seek work on other farms.

23. A frequently cited study by CEPAL published figures that would lead to the conclusion that 14 percent of the farms in 1950 were rented (UN 1973). The correct census data are contained in El Salvador Ministerio de Economía (1975).

These renters were working 88,495 farms (33 percent of all farms). If colonos are added to this total, indirect tenancy totaled 38 percent in 1971.

One can conclude from this examination of census data that tenancy is a fundamental mechanism of land tenure in El Salvador and that changing the legal structure seems merely to alter the terminology under which land is indirectly held. This finding helps place in perspective the results of the EHPM, which may otherwise appear to some observers surprisingly high given the reforms initiated under Phase III (Decree 207) of the 1980 land reform and the laws passed prior to that reform. Although it is widely believed that those reforms made tenancy a much smaller problem in El Salvador, this is not the case.

On 23 March 1972, a provisional rental law (Decree 509) was passed that froze rental rates at the level of the agricultural year 1971–1972 (article 7) and gave tenants rather than landlords the option to renew leases. That law was renewed in 1973 and again in 1974. In March 1975, two new and more comprehensive laws were passed (Decrees 27 and 29) fixing the maximum amount of rent that could be charged for several kinds of crops (Jackson 1980, 184–86). The law went further in giving priority in renting land to groups of farmers and cooperatives. On 4 April 1979, another even more inclusive law was passed regarding renting (Decree 157).

The Phase III reform of 1980 went still further than the 1979 law. It was based on the principle that land must fulfill its social function and that “private agricultural land holdings are complying with their inherent social function whenever they are directly exploited by their owners” (Decree 257). Phase III decreed eligible for immediate expropriation lands that at the date of the decree were being leased, rented, or share-cropped. Under the terms of this law, some 52,000 former renters eventually became property owners.

It is impossible to say how many rented farms actually existed in 1980 at the time of the Phase III decree.<sup>24</sup> If it had been left in place, presumably no new renting would have occurred. But on 18 May 1982, the Constituent Assembly restored the legality of renting land for agricultural purposes via Decree 6. Hence it is not surprising that the EHPM uncovered substantial numbers of renters in El Salvador.

These findings vary dramatically from the McReynolds report, the main source for recent studies and reports on land tenure in El Salvador and also the source of the conviction within the foreign-aid community in El Salvador that Phase III of the land reform achieved such a significant impact. The McReynolds study found that “by 1988, the number of renters had dropped by 80% since 1971” (McReynolds et al. 1989, i). That

24. A 1977 USAID study estimated that about half of all farms in El Salvador were rented, which according to the 1971 agricultural census, would have meant some 135,000 farms (Simon and Stephens 1982, 19 and n. 28).

study also reported that renting had declined from 60 percent of farms in 1971 to only 14 percent of farms in 1987. Further, the McReynolds study reported 39,998 rented and sharecropped properties, but the EHPM survey found 106,000.

The major difference in the proportion of renters uncovered by the McReynolds team when compared with the 1971 census is probably attributable to errors in the former study. First, the McReynolds study was based on a sample of fewer than 3,000 farms and utilized cadastral information as the sample frame. It is likely that the cadastral database contains a systematic bias of underreporting rented properties. Further, information on large areas of rural El Salvador has not been updated since the late 1970s, when hostilities began, making the sample frame woefully out-of-date. In addition, the cadastral survey has not yet covered 18 percent of the national territory. Finally, the EHPM, with its sample size four times larger than the McReynolds study, is likely to be more accurate.

But the major factor influencing the estimate of renting in the McReynolds study was the exclusion from their 1988 database collected by PERA (Proyecto Planificación y Evaluación de la Reforma Agraria) of persons renting less than 2 manzanas, by far the largest group of renters. To remedy this exclusion, Peter Gore conducted a study in 1989 of 272 landowners from the 1988 study who had reported renting out or conceding the use of a parcel smaller than 1.4 hectares. The Gore team was able to reinterview 135 of those individuals and found that they were renting to 1,256 farmers. Those farmers were interviewed in turn and proved to be renting an average of .66 hectares. The Gore report could not determine, however, how large a proportion of all farmers this group comprised. The report surmised that the small renters "could have comprised as many as a quarter of all agricultural producers in the country" (emphasis in original), but it provided no factual basis for that conclusion.<sup>25</sup> In short, the estimates of renters from the McReynolds and Gore studies do not provide a solid basis for comparison with the present findings.

#### AGRARIAN STRUCTURE IN EL SALVADOR, 1961–1991

The discussion thus far has presented a detailed picture of agrarian structure as of 1991–1992. To make this picture useful in addressing the central question posed at the outset, the dynamics in agrarian structure between 1961 and 1991 will be presented. To this end, the results of the 1991 MIPLAN survey will be compared with the population and agricultural census data from 1961 and 1971. Such comparisons are not easy to make, however, because the censuses have a number of limitations. As noted, the agricultural and population censuses generated sepa-

25. See "Appendices B and C: Sampling Methodologies," in McReynolds et al. (1989, 22).



TABLE 4 Economically Active National and Agricultural Populations in El Salvador, 1961–1991

National Totals	1961 Census		1971 Census		1991–1992 MIPLAN Survey	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Economically active national population (EANP)	807,092	(100.0)	1,166,479	(100.0)	1,781,582	(100.0)
EANP older than 15 <sup>a</sup>	727,736	(90.2)	1,043,334	(89.4)	1,633,993	(91.7)
Economically active agricultural population older than 15 <sup>b</sup>	416,728	(59.9)	542,879	(46.5)	581,661	(32.6)

Sources: El Salvador Ministerio de Economía 1965, 1967, 1975, 1977; and El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991–1992

<sup>a</sup> Census data for 1961 and 1971 used age categories of 10–14 and 15–19. Therefore the age group of 16 and older for these two censuses was computed by interpolation.

<sup>b</sup> Salvadoran census data on economic activity is reported in two ways, by branch (*rama*) and by occupation. These figures differ slightly because not all workers in the agricultural branch have agricultural occupations and some workers in branches other than agriculture have agricultural occupations (as gardeners, for example). In this table and article, data are based on occupation rather than on branch because the published census provides much finer breakdowns by occupation, including by specific occupations (workers versus farmers) and by age.

rate databases that were not linked. For example, the agricultural census identifies the number of farms but does not specify how the farmers who work these lands are employed. As a result, the agricultural census does not reveal how many small landholders are simultaneously employed as landless laborers. The population censuses, in contrast, identify the economically active population and the unemployed subset but do not distinguish between agricultural laborers who have steady jobs versus those who do not. Furthermore, the 1961 census identified family farm laborers as a separate category, but the 1971 census did not. To overcome these and other limitations in making a comparison across all three databases, it was necessary to employ a number of assumptions, projections, and interpolations. The notes accompanying tables 4 and 5 explain the procedures used to allow direct comparisons among the 1961 and 1971 censuses and the 1991–1992 MIPLAN survey. Readers may take issue with some procedures used

in comparing the databases, but the overall patterns are clear enough that even substantial adjustments would not alter many of the conclusions.

A number of major conclusions can be drawn from this thirty-year comparison. Figure 1 (based on the numbers shown in greater detail at the top of table 4) shows that although the population of El Salvador has grown rapidly over the past thirty years, increasing from 2.6 to 5.3 million, the relative share of the national workforce in agriculture declined substantially, from nearly 60 percent to less than a third of the total. Hence the agricultural sector remains the largest sector in El Salvador but no longer predominates.<sup>26</sup>

Second, although the absolute size of the economically active agricultural population has increased, its rate of increase has slowed dramatically. As table 4 shows, between 1961 and 1971, the economically active agricultural population increased from 416,728 to 542,929 (an average annual increase of 3 percent), whereas from 1971 to 1991, the economically active agricultural population grew to only 581,661 (an annual increase of .4 percent). Yet at the same time, the Salvadoran population doubled from 2.6 million to 5.2 million at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent.

Third, the landless and land-poor populations have declined in both relative and absolute terms (see table 5). These populations grew from 211,617 in 1961 to a peak of 326,466 persons in 1971 (an increase of 54 percent). By 1991, however, the landless and land-poor population total had declined to 295,130. In relative terms, the landless and land-poor populations declined from 60.1 percent of the economically active agricultural population to 50.7 percent. These populations also shrank in importance in the national scene, declining from 29.1 percent of the economically active population in 1961 to 18.0 percent in 1991.

The only exception to this overall shrinkage is found in the unemployed and the family labor categories. Unemployed agricultural labor has increased in relative and absolute terms, no doubt due to the effects of the protracted war on the economy. The increase in family labor may be a function of high birthrates, which have continuously lowered the average age of Salvadorans, with the result being that more children are living with their parents and working on family farms.<sup>27</sup> The magnitude

26. Figure 1 is based on tables 4 and 5 with the addition of 1980 UN data (UN 1991, 42). Population data for 1961–1991 were taken from studies by CELADE (Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía) (see El Salvador MIPLAN and FUNAP 1986; El Salvador MIPLAN 1992). Economically active population was taken from the population census data for 1961 and 1971 (El Salvador Ministerio de Economía 1981, 48) and from UN estimates for 1980 (UN 1991, 42). In each case, the data were adjusted to exclude the economically active populations between the ages of ten and fifteen in order to match the MIPLAN survey analysis. Because it provided population data for the age group fifteen to nineteen, the size of the fifteen-year-old category was interpolated.

27. It is also possible that the 1971 family labor figure was artificially low. As explained in footnote *d* to table 5, the 1971 figure had to be extrapolated from the 1961 census data.

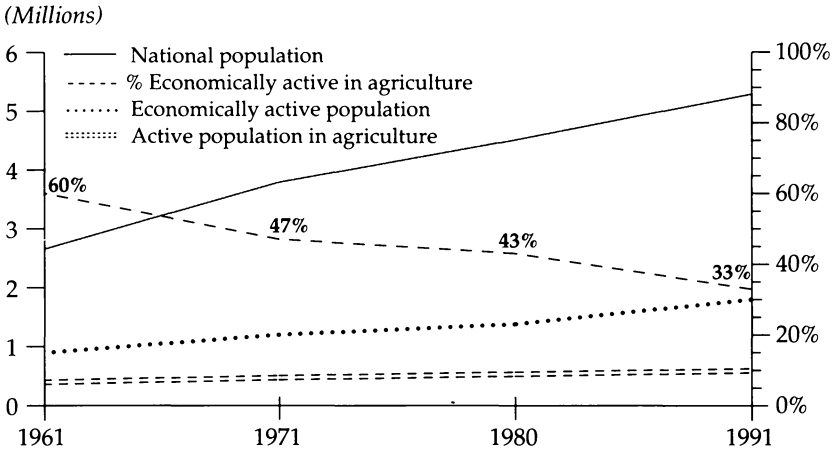


FIGURE 1 Economically Active Population of El Salvador: 1961–1992  
Sources: See table 4 and note 26.

of the increase is probably overstated, however, because the 1971 agricultural census did not categorize family workers separately as did the 1961 census. For that reason, I have estimated the 1971 family worker population based on the 1961 census, as is explained in the notes to table 5. The decline in the landed population of 1971 also seems exaggerated. Perhaps some of those farmers identified as land-poor might be better classified as landed. Overall, however, even if a different categorization scheme were utilized that would shift around the landless, landed, land-poor, and family labor categories, it is evident that in relative terms, the agricultural population and the landless and land-poor subsets all declined substantially during the 1980s.

**LAND REFORM, THE PEACE ACCORDS, AND PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN EL SALVADOR**

These findings are rather startling for those who have noted correctly that the population of El Salvador continues to burgeon while its land area remains constant. With an expanding population and finite land, a Malthusian crisis was looming by the early 1970s, and thus it could not have been predicted that the problem would have diminished twenty years later.

The foremost advocate of a continuing long-term trend toward land scarcity in El Salvador is William Durham (1979). His careful study concluded that the long-term process of increasing land concentration, which he refers to as “distributional dynamics,” “provides a better single-factor explanation than population dynamics [population growth] for the

TABLE 5 Agrarian Structure in El Salvador, 1961–1991

Category of Agricultural Workers	Economically Active Agricultural			
	1961 Census		1971 Census	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Landed <sup>a</sup>	118,687	(28.5)	78,167	(14.4)
Land-poor <sup>b</sup>	96,456	(23.1)	119,350	(22.0)
Landless (temporary day workers) <sup>c</sup>	115,161	(27.6)	207,116	(38.1)
Permanent wage workers <sup>c</sup>	51,498	(12.4)	92,640	(17.1)
Family laborers	34,926	(8.4)	45,606 <sup>d</sup>	(8.4)
Total	416,728	(100.0)	542,879	(100.0)
Unemployed out of above total <sup>e</sup>	22,008	(5.3)	33,994	(6.3)

Sources: El Salvador Ministerio de Economía 1965, 1967, 1975, 1977; and El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991–1992

NOTE: Deviations in percentages from 100.0 are due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup> Includes 3,387 administrators for 1961 and 5,692 for 1971. The published 1961 census categorized individuals as landed (*agricultores y ganaderos*) if their principal occupations were based on land they owned or rented. These figures correspond closely to the 1961 agricultural census, which counted 119,842 farms of 1 hectare or larger. Farms may have more than one economically active person, but these are accounted for in the subcategories of family labor, temporary workers, and permanent wage workers. The 1971 census distinguished between diversified and monoculture farms.

<sup>b</sup> The land-poor figures are drawn from the agricultural censuses, which report land in hectares, whereas all data in the MIPLAN survey are expressed in manzanas. The 1961 census did not subdivide the listing of farms smaller than 1 hectare, and the MIPLAN data set groups all farms from 1 to 4 manzanas in a single cohort. Thus in this table, for 1961 and 1971, the land-poor are those having less than 1 hectare, whereas for the MIPLAN survey, the land-poor are those with less than 1 manzana, or .7 hectare. The decline in 1991 of the land-poor partly reflects the smaller size limit used for that year. The land-poor data were taken from the agricultural censuses because the population census does not show the size of farmland held by various occupational categories. No adjustment for the group from ten to fifteen years old has been made in the agricultural census data because the 1961 population census reported only 6 individuals between the ages of ten and fourteen who were landowners (*agricultores y ganaderos*). The 1971 census reported no such individuals.

<sup>c</sup> The published population census does not distinguish between permanent and temporary wage workers, grouping them together in the category of agricultural workers (*trabajadores agrícolas*). To make this important distinction in this table, the agricultural worker category (minus those younger than sixteen) was subdivided in the same proportion as the 1991 MIPLAN survey, which allowed for this distinction. In the MIPLAN survey, 30.9 percent of the agricultural workers were permanent day laborers and the remainder temporary. The MIPLAN survey also found that 9.9 percent of the agricultural laborers (permanent and temporary combined) were simultaneously small landholders who owned 1 manzana or less of land. To avoid double-counting these individuals as both land-poor and landless, 9.9 percent of the land-poor were subtracted from the agricultural census data. As a result, those who own less than 1 hectare and are agricultural laborers are categorized in this table

<i>Population</i>		<i>Agricultural Workers as a % of the Economically Active National Population</i>		
<i>1991–1992 MIPLAN Survey</i>		<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1991</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>(%)</i>			
136,171	(23.4)	(16.3)	(6.7)	(8.3)
96,821	(16.6)	(13.4)	(10.2)	(5.9)
198,309	(34.1)	(15.7)	(17.8)	(12.1)
77,001	(13.2)	(7.0)	(7.9)	(4.7)
73,359	(12.6)	(3.8)	(3.9)	(4.5)
581,661	(99.9)	—	—	—
58,293	(10.0)	(3.0)	(2.9)	(3.6)

as laborers. The remaining land-poor group was then subtracted from the agricultural worker category because these individuals were all subsumed in the worker category by the population census.

<sup>d</sup> Because the 1971 population census did not include a separate category for family laborers, the 1961 percentages were used to estimate the 1971 value.

<sup>e</sup> The MIPLAN numbers have been adjusted to reincorporate the unemployed. The MIPLAN data set allows segregating the unemployed from other workers, a procedure followed throughout this article. The census does not allow this distinction, including the unemployed among the economically active population and providing only an overall total of unemployed in each major sector. To permit direct comparison between the MIPLAN survey and the census data, the MIPLAN survey results have been adjusted here to reintegrate the unemployed back into the occupation category they belonged to when employed. The population census gives the total unemployed in the agricultural sector but does not provide age breakdowns that would allow exclusion of the unemployed younger than sixteen. It is unlikely that the group from ten to fifteen years old contains a significant number of individuals, and thus failure to exclude them does not greatly change the data.

land scarcity experienced by the bulk of El Salvador’s agricultural population” (Durham 1979, 48). Durham emphasized that population growth provides an important but secondary explanation, demonstrating that between 1892 and 1971, land concentration reduced the amount of land potentially available to the landless and land-poor from an average of 7.4 hectares per farmer to 1.5 hectares, whereas population growth was responsible only for a further shrinking of the land available to 0.4 hectares. In other terms, “5.96 hectares are absorbed by land concentration, and only 1.07 are lost to population growth” (Durham 1979, 48).

My analysis does not contradict Durham’s findings for the period

through 1971 but has discovered three new dynamics after 1971 that dramatically altered the long-term pattern of land scarcity in El Salvador: urbanization, out-migration, and land reform. Michael Lipton has argued, "while urbanization may reduce pressures for rural reforms, it is greatly overstated by many data sets" (Lipton 1993, 645). But the extent of migration in El Salvador seems hard to overstate. As indicated in figure 1, the substantial decline in the proportion of the Salvadoran population working in agriculture in recent decades has helped reverse the trend traced by Durham. The absolute numbers of Salvadorans engaged in agriculture dropped because of slower population growth in recent years, partly due to out-migration by refugees fleeing the war but more because of declining birthrates. Between 1950 and 1955, birthrates averaged 6.5 per female, fell to 4.5 in the period from 1990 to 1995, and are projected to drop to 3.5 by the year 2,000 (El Salvador MIPLAN and FUNAP 1986). As a result, Durham's prediction of 8.8 million Salvadorans by the year 2,000 (1979, 49–50), based on 1974 CELADE projections, was revised downward to 6.7 million and again to 6.4 million (El Salvador MIPLAN and FUNAP 1986; El Salvador MIPLAN 1992).

The third factor altering the pattern was the land reform initiated in 1981, which will be intensified by the reforms agreed to as part of the peace accords. In relative terms, the 1980 El Salvador land reform was the most extensive nonsocialist reform ever undertaken in Latin America, except in Mexico (see Grindle 1986, 134–36).<sup>28</sup> Some 85,000 families received land under the reform (10 percent of the current Salvadoran population if one assumes six members per rural family). In terms of the economically active population, this percentage represents about 125,000 workers, or 21 percent of the economically active population in agriculture. The land area granted to peasants was extensive by any measure: 289,000 hectares, representing 14 percent of the nation's total land area or one-fifth of the farmland (Thiesenhusen 1993). In comparison, the well-known Bolivian land reform involved only 10 percent of the agricultural labor force and 13 percent of the land in farms (García 1970, 314). The Salvadoran reform thus changed radically the distributional dynamics found by Durham because large landholdings in El Salvador have virtually ceased to exist.

Phase I of the 1980 reform ordered the expropriation of all farms over 500 hectares, resulting in the seizure of 472 farms. Phase II, which originally extended the process to farms ranging from 100 to 500 hectares, was later restricted to the 245–500 hectare range by the Constitution of 1983. During the 1980s, much of the land in this range was sold to the government or subdivided and sold to private individuals. The peace

28. According to Grindle's data, Peru's reform affected far more families (Grindle 1986), but in relative terms, it was no larger than that of El Salvador.

accords now provide for transferring to war combatants the remaining farms in this size range, fewer than 50 farms. In all, the peace accords are projected to provide land to some 47,500 families, representing as many as 75,000 economically active agricultural workers. It is too early to tell whether all the land-reform components of the accords will be fulfilled, but expectations are that they eventually will be.

The 1980 land reform, which provided 125,000 workers with land, helps explain why fewer landless and land-poor in El Salvador were found in 1991 than in 1971. Even more important in this decline have been the rapid urbanization of the population and international out-migration. If the peace accords are carried out fully, the landless and land-poor will be reduced by an additional 75,000, leaving about 175,000 Salvadorans in this category. When combined with nearly 60,000 unemployed agricultural workers, the total will reach about 235,000.

The landless and land-poor thus are a smaller problem today than they were on the eve of the civil war. It also appears that the problem will diminish further as a result of the current land reform and continued urbanization. Yet landless, land-poor, and unemployed agricultural populations still make up an army of nearly a quarter-million Salvadoran workers. Sadly, their prospects are not very good.

If the government of El Salvador were to attempt to provide the landless, land-poor, and unemployed agricultural population with the same amount of land being given to the beneficiaries of the peace accords (3.5 hectares each), some 1 million hectares of land would be required (45 percent of the total land area of El Salvador). The government of El Salvador is currently finding it difficult to acquire the land it already promised to distribute under the peace accords. Because there are no large farms left to distribute, it will be impossible to find more than a small fraction of the 1 million hectares required. Under these conditions, the landless, land-poor, and unemployed are even less likely to be able to obtain land. Moreover, tenants will find it hard to convince owners to sell their land because land scarcity will continue to drive land prices up and make holding land a good hedge against inflation. As Malcolm Childress found, land prices have already increased dramatically since the war ended and show every sign of rising further (Childress 1993).

In terms of political stability, El Salvador appears to be in much less danger of rural rebellion today than in the 1970s. International migration, urbanization, and land reform have radically changed the conditions for revolution. Huntington argued that "urban migration is, in some measure, a substitute for rural revolution," stressing that even though urbanization can cause disruption in the cities, it is in the countryside that revolutionary situations develop (Huntington 1968, 299). This argument coincides with Wickham-Crowley's (1991) assessment that a necessary condition for successful revolution in Latin America since the 1950s

has been a major rural-based insurgency. Both positions are consistent with the findings of Prosterman and Riedinger (1987), who argued that when the landless and tenant populations of a country exceed one-fourth of the total population, revolution becomes a distinct probability. When these theses are applied to El Salvador, 15.8 percent of the population were landless in 1971 and 10.1 percent were tenants, a total of 25.9 percent. By 1991, however, the landless had diminished to 10.4 percent and tenants to 6.5 percent of the national population, a total of 17 percent. Using that measure alone, El Salvador's probability of experiencing an agrarian-based revolution has markedly diminished.

But even if El Salvador may no longer be a likely candidate for an agrarian-based revolution, it seems obvious that the landless, land-poor, unemployed, and tenant populations of El Salvador are not going to disappear in the foreseeable future. The question then becomes, although the threat of rural insurrection may no longer affect national politics as it once did, what are the chances of rural unrest in El Salvador? Many studies have found that relative deprivation and inequality have been major sources of discontent and rebellious activity. Income inequality is one of the strongest predictors of insurrection (Muller and Seligson 1987; Muller, Seligson, and Fu 1989). In El Salvador, are the landless, land-poor, unemployed, and tenants deprived relative to other peasants and the nation as a whole, or do they manage to earn a living that is respectable in the Salvadoran context? Answering that question is best accomplished by comparing the incomes of these groups with those of other peasants.

### *Comparative Income Data*

Calculating income by using surveys has always been difficult, and the data utilized in the EHPM do not fully overcome these limitations. One serious problem is that respondents are often reluctant to disclose all their income. Among agricultural populations in developing nations, the problem is worse because many small farmers keep few if any records of their sales and production expenses. They often know what their income is only in a vague way. Fortunately, the EHPM was particularly careful in attempting to obtain as much income information as possible, including crop income (and family consumption of crops) and production costs (including labor costs but excluding land costs). The EHPM also included income from forestry, fishing, livestock, and poultry. Thus farm income was calculated as the total of all sales plus the total retail equivalent of household consumption of crops minus production expenses. This total was then prorated on a monthly basis to make it comparable with the incomes of other kinds of employment that are often based on monthly salary income.

Because farm income applies only to those who have land, it is



TABLE 6 *Income of Salvadoran Farmers (in colones)*

<i>Type of Farmer</i>	<i>Mean Monthly Income</i>	<i>Monthly Income per Capita</i>
Farmers with employees	2,428	747
Cooperative members	1,539	470
Farmers	1,232	379
Land-poor	772	237
Permanent day laborers	668	205
Temporary day laborers	556	166
Unemployed	204	53
Unpaid family laborers	91	28

Source: El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991-1992

necessary to include in the calculation additional sources of income: wages earned (on a monthly basis) from principal and secondary occupations; payment in kind (*en especie*) and payment in allowances (*bonificaciones*), estimated on a monthly basis; and income from pensions, remittances, contributions from family members living in El Salvador, rents, business income, and other sources of income. The total of these income sources is taken here as the basis for calculating total income.<sup>29</sup>

As is apparent in table 6, those with access to land earn far more than the landless and land-poor. Members of cooperatives also have comparatively high incomes, earning somewhat more than farmers who do not employ laborers. Large and regular government infusions of subsidized (and in many cases nonreimbursed) credit to cooperatives by the government have allowed the co-ops to provide employment to members and their families, thus raising their incomes above the level of farmers who do not have access to regular employment.

Temporary wage workers (the "landless laborers" in this study) earn less than permanent wage workers, but the difference is not large. From this perspective, the distinction between landless workers who are temporary wage workers and the landless who are permanent is not as great as it might have seemed at the outset of this study. But the insecurity of temporary wage labor carries significant psychological costs that make the distinction meaningful nonetheless. The situation of unpaid family laborers and the unemployed is particularly distressing, given their monthly incomes of less than eleven dollars (U.S.) for family laborers and less than twenty-one dollars per month for the unemployed.

In absolute terms, the landless, land-poor, and unemployed all earn low incomes. But it is relative rather than absolute deprivation that is associated with rebellion. To examine the question of relative deprivation

29. An analysis of farm-based income reveals similar patterns to those shown here for total income but has been omitted due to space constraints.

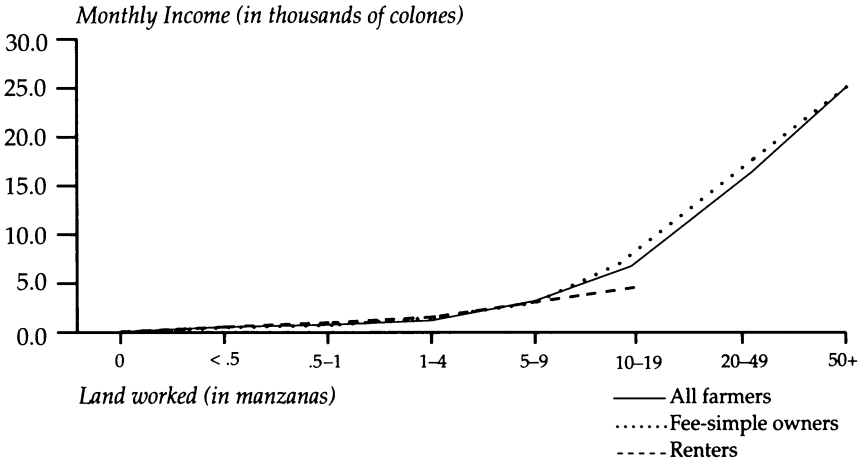


FIGURE 2 Monthly Agriculture Income and Area of Land Worked

tion, these income figures need to be placed into a broader national perspective. In the industrial sector nationwide, the EHPM data show that steady wage-workers earned an average of 1,161 colones per month. Average earnings increased to 1,243 colones in urban areas but declined to 819 colones in rural areas. Although the higher incomes earned in urban areas are reduced in real terms by the higher cost of housing, it is clear nonetheless that industrial employment, urban or rural, would provide significantly higher incomes for the land-poor, temporary wage-workers, and the unemployed. Incomes in the construction sector are even higher, averaging 1,238 colones nationwide. The data shown in table 6 indicate that farmers with at least 1 manzana of land (or those who belong to a cooperative) earn as much or more than they would as industrial or construction workers. Hence farmers are better off to continue to farm if they have access to enough land.

National comparisons become even sharper when the data are transformed into per capita income (see table 6). For El Salvador as a whole, the national monthly per capita average in 1991–1992 was 367 colones (about 550 dollars per year).<sup>30</sup> Urban per capita monthly incomes averaged 519 colones and rural averaged 228. Per capita incomes were calculated among the agricultural population by using the 1991–1992 size of rural households of 5.23 persons, and the number of employed persons per household average of 1.61.<sup>31</sup> Thus each employed worker was sup-

30. This figure is only about half that produced by using national accounts statistics according to World Bank methodology. The per capita income figures given by the World Bank include many sources of income that are not included in a labor force study (especially profits of corporations). The labor force survey provides a more realistic picture of disposable income in the hands of the labor force.

31. Rural households are used here rather than agricultural households because any given

TABLE 7 *Monthly Income (in colones) of Salvadoran Farmers according to the Number of Manzanas Worked*

Type of Farmer	0	< .5	.5-1	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50+
All farmers	0.0	0.6	0.7	1.1	3.0	5.9	14.9	26.1
Fee-simple owners	0.0	0.6	0.6	1.3	2.9	6.3	15.8	26.1
Renters	0.0	0.7	0.6	1.0	2.7	4.4		

Source: El Salvador MIPLAN Multi-Purpose Household Survey 1991-1992.

porting 3.25 persons. Dividing the income data shown in table 6 by this number provides per capita income data, as shown in the right-hand column. Once again it is clear that farmers with access to at least 1 manzana of land can earn more than the national average, whereas the land-poor, landless, and unemployed cannot. Table 6 also shows that even permanent wage laborers earn considerably less than the national average income.

Figure 2 and table 7 show the strong relationship between the amount of land worked and agricultural income.<sup>32</sup> Income from other sources is excluded here to emphasize the direct relationship between land and the income derived from it. For farmers with access to land, the larger the amount of land, the higher the agricultural income, whether they have fee-simple access or they rent. Among those with less than half a manzana of land, renters actually have higher agricultural incomes from their land than do fee-simple owners (685 colones versus 583 colones), probably due to the higher intensity of cultivation among those who rent land versus those who own it. For farmers with at least half a manzana, renters earn less than owners, demonstrating that renting takes its toll on peasant income. For example, among farms between 1 and 4 manzanas in size, renters earn 1,027 colones monthly versus 1,321 colones monthly for fee-simple owners. The difference persists in the cohorts for the largest farms, but the largest cohorts (20 manzanas or larger) contain too few renters to yield reliable averages.

Table 8 summarizes the impact of the form of land tenure and the amount of land worked on total incomes of the farmers. This table includes data on only those who work land and therefore excludes the landless. The left-hand column for each tenure type reports total monthly income, whereas the right-hand column reports that income when controlled for the amount of land being worked.<sup>33</sup> For all tenure types, the

household may contain workers in more than one sector. The data reported elsewhere in this article focus on the agricultural-sector labor forces, which are mostly rural. But a portion of agricultural-sector households are urban, and therefore the per capita figures shown in this section will vary if the household is located in an urban area, where household size is smaller.

32. Note, however, that the horizontal axis is not linear, which results in an exaggerated curve.

33. The control is accomplished by introducing the amount of land worked (in manzanas) as a covariate in the analysis of variance equation.

TABLE 8 *Income according to Type of Land Tenure in El Salvador (in colones)*

<i>Tenure Type</i>	<i>Monthly Income</i>	<i>Income Adjusted according to Land Size</i>
Fee-simple owners	1,960	1,682
Farmers with free use of land	1,238	1,415
Renters	981	1,094
Sharecroppers	733	850
Colonos	1,068	1,544
Cooperative members	1,422	1,486
Tenants with land promised	1,354	827

Source: El Salvador, MIPLAN, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1991–1992.

monthly income averaged 1,316 colones (about 165 dollars). All those with access to land fare relatively well when compared to wage-labor jobs in the industrial sector (which averaged 1,161 colones per month). Only renters, sharecroppers, and colonos fell below the income earned in wage-labor industrial-sector jobs. Tenure type as well as the amount of land worked have a significant impact on income (significant at the .001 level). For land owned in fee simple, the impact of controlling for the amount of land worked reduces the incomes of this group from 1,960 to 1,682, much closer to the mean of all those with land but still far above the overall mean of 1,316 colones. Hence even when controlling for the impact of the amount of land, fee-simple farmers do better as a group than farmers in any other category of land tenure. They are followed by farmers who have free use of land. When the amount of land the second group owns is included in the equation, their incomes approach those of fee-simple owners. Presumably, many of these farmers are children of fee-simple owners who expect to inherit free-use land from their parents. As a result, many of the free-use farmers presumably will become fee-simple farmers over time, and thus it is not surprising that their incomes nearly match those of fee-simple farmers once the data are adjusted to compensate for the smaller amount of land they work.

Perhaps the most important finding in this portion of the analysis is that the largest land-tenure group in numbers—the renters and sharecroppers—have the lowest income of any major group (only the “promise of sale” group, when controlled for size, is lower). Renters’ incomes fall below the national average of the industrial sector (1,161 colones per month) but are higher than the wages paid for rural industrial jobs (819 colones per month). The finding that sharecroppers’ incomes are lower than those of renters confirms the opinion that renting is a somewhat more desirable arrangement than sharecropping. When the size of rented and sharecropped farms is controlled, incomes increase but remain far below the average for all farms. This result suggests that those who encouraged the enactment of the Phase III “land-to-the-tiller” law were

on firm ground regarding the income implications of indirect land tenancy.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data presented here reveal that a triple irony faces the rural poor in El Salvador. First, although the war, land reform, urban and international migration, and declines in the birthrate have combined to diminish the "agrarian question" and its importance in the national scheme of things, the problem of access to land has not been solved for hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans. The unavailability of sufficient land will prevent most of them from acquiring land and thus condemn them to absolute poverty and relative deprivation. Landless and land-poor Salvadoran peasants earn per capita incomes that are less than two-thirds of those of small farmers, and unemployed peasants earn only 14 percent as much as small farmers. Even among those who have access to land, renters and sharecroppers earn incomes that average only half of those with fee-simple ownership of farmland. For most of the landless, land-poor, unemployed, and tenant farmers in El Salvador—the very ones in whose name the war was fought—neither the war nor the peace following it will lift them out of poverty.

Second, the peace accords gave highest priority for land claims to those who fought for the government or the army.<sup>34</sup> The landless, land-poor, and unemployed who stayed on the sidelines during the war and did not engage in combat or actively supported the guerrillas got nothing. This reality is not lost on El Salvador's deprived rural masses, but there is little they can do about it at this point.

Third, because the absolute and relative size of the poor rural population has shrunk, political parties across the spectrum have less incentive to serve that constituency and more incentive to serve those seeking urban jobs. Even the FMLN, which fought a twelve-year civil war in the name of the landless peasants, must focus on urban employment because many of its peasant supporters have migrated to the cities.

In sum, the decline of the agrarian question in El Salvador bodes well for the prospects for a lasting peace in El Salvador. But in the final analysis, it may be that as peace comes to El Salvador, the legacy of human suffering caused by land scarcity and overpopulation will remain an enduring feature of the landscape for decades to come.

34. Of the former war combatants, 15,400 are to receive a total of 53,000 hectares of land in the first stage of the land transfers. In the second stage, an additional 4,000 beneficiaries of the peace accords stand next in line to receive 14,000 hectares of land, to be followed ultimately by an additional 28,100 persons eligible to receive 98,350 hectares (Vickers and Spence 1992, 21–22).

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