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THESIS

**THE OUTCOMES OF INSURGENCY AND PARTY
SYSTEM STABILITY IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

by

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March 2020

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**THE OUTCOMES OF INSURGENCY AND PARTY SYSTEM STABILITY
IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

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ABSTRACT

Political parties that have emerged from civil conflicts in Central America have experienced uneven levels of success and significant variation in competition. In the case of Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) has won several national elections against a limited opposition that has struggled to consolidate. In El Salvador, two parties, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and the Nationalist Republican Alliance, emerged from the civil conflict. Each has individually been able to consolidate power and win national elections. What explains this variation in party system stability? This thesis contends that the variation is determined by the outcomes of the insurgencies and how those outcomes have subsequently contributed differently to the distribution of political power. Insurgencies that were outright successful, such as the FSLN, tended to consolidate more power than those that were not. In El Salvador, for instance, two parties shared political power as a result of an unsuccessful insurgency that ended in peace negotiations. This outcome allowed political power to be more evenly distributed. Party system stability has been historically uneven throughout the region since the third wave of democratization, a phenomenon that can alternatively be explained by the distribution of political power following civil war.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANSESAL	Salvadoran National Security Agency
ARENA	Nationalist Republican Alliance in El Salvador
CD	Democratic Convergence in El Salvador
CDU	United Democratic Center in El Salvador
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front
GAN	Great National Alliance in El Salvador
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization
LASA	Latin American Studies Association
M-26	26th of July Movement in Cuba
MAP	Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement in Nicaragua
MNR	Revolutionary National Movement in El Salvador
ORDEN	Nationalist Democratic Organization
PCD	Democratic Conservative Party in Nicaragua
PCN	National Conciliation Party in El Salvador
PCN	Nicaraguan Communist Party in Nicaragua
PDC	Christian Democratic Party in El Salvador
PLC	Constitutional Liberal Party in Nicaragua
PLI	Independent Liberal Party in Nicaragua
PPSC	Popular Social Christian Party in Nicaragua
PRTC	Party of Central American Workers in El Salvador
PSN	Nicaraguan Socialist Party
UNO	National Opposition Union in Nicaragua
URNG	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The political parties that emerged from civil conflicts in Central America have experienced uneven levels of success. For example, while the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua emerged as a successful political party after its revolution in 1979, no opposition parties have been able to consolidate.¹ The result of this has been an uneven playing field that has arguably contributed to a pattern of party system instability. Mainwaring and Scully argue “that the critical difference among Latin American party systems is whether or not a competitive party system is institutionalized. An institutionalized party system implies stability in interparty competition.”² This perceived instability and lack of competition in Nicaragua was demonstrated in the most recent presidential election in 2016. The FSLN presidential candidate, Daniel Ortega, dominated by winning his third consecutive election with over 72 percent of the vote.³ President Ortega “had been widely expected to win both due to the popularity of his social programmes and because he faced no obvious political challengers.”⁴

In the case of El Salvador, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) steadily emerged from insurgency to form a successful political party after its incorporation into politics in 1992. Unlike the FSLN, however, the FMLN competes against an equally successful political party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). Both parties were born from the Salvadoran civil war that occurred from 1980 to 1992. Although the

¹ Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, and Brandon Van Dyck, “Introduction: Challenges of Party Building in Latin America,” in *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*, ed. Steven Levitsky et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 44.

² Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, “Introduction: Party Systems in Latin America,” in *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1.

³ “Nicaragua Leader Daniel Ortega Wins Third Consecutive Term” *BBC*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37892477>.

⁴ *BBC*, “Nicaragua Leader Daniel Ortega Wins.”

most recent presidential election in 2018 was won by an outside party,⁵ El Salvador's party system can still boast some of the lowest levels of volatility in both presidential and legislative elections within the region due to what could easily be considered a competitive and institutionalized party system.⁶

What explains this variation in party system stability? A further evaluation of each of these parties and their insurgent outcomes may provide some explanations. Throughout the last half of the twentieth century, Latin America experienced two major waves of insurgency that swept across the region from the 1960s to the 1990s in response to years of political repression and economic instability in the region.⁷ Some insurgencies, such as Cuba's 26th of July Movement (M-26) and the FSLN, have succeeded in seizing state power.⁸ Other insurgency movements, such as Venezuela's Armed Forces of National Liberation and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG), have failed in this regard.⁹ Additional insurgencies, such as El Salvador's FMLN, found political incorporation through peace negotiations, and they were neither defeated nor did they fully seize state power. These examples demonstrate significant variation in insurgent outcomes that also correlate with current party system configurations within Central America. What have been the implications of these divergent outcomes between the winners, losers, and stalemates for patterns of party system stability in the region? How did revolutionary outcomes shape these countries' experiences with democracy?

The current political climate for each of these countries differs significantly as do their revolutionary outcomes. This research explores this observed relationship through an

⁵ Charles T. Call, "The Significance of Nayib Bukele's Surprising Election as President of El Salvador," *Brookings* (blog), February 5, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/02/05/the-significance-of-nayib-bukeles-surprising-election-as-president-of-el-salvador/>.

⁶ Kenneth M. Roberts, "Historical Timing, Political Cleavages, and Party-Building in Latin America," in *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*, ed. Steven Levitsky et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72.

⁷ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, "Winners, Losers and Also-Rans: Toward a Comparative Sociology of Latin American Guerrilla Movements," in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Susan Eckstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 132.

⁸ Wickham-Crowley, "Winners, Losers and Also-Rans," 143.

⁹ Wickham-Crowley, 133–134.

examination of Nicaragua and El Salvador's separate insurgency periods—two major cases of insurgency that took place in Central America from 1961 to 1992 that had drastically different outcomes. The fundamental questions that are explored throughout this thesis are: 1) How did the outcomes of revolutionary insurgencies shape party system outcomes in Central America? 2) Why have some post-conflict scenarios resulted in stable democratic competition whereas others continue to survive on the edges of democracy?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is important to understand why party systems stabilize because party systems are an essential component of democratic stability. Mainwaring and Scully argue that the prospect of a stabilized democracy—that is both considered legitimate and able to make effective policy—is highly contingent on the nature of party systems.¹⁰ Institutionalized party systems give regularity to patterns of competition and provide democratic expression to the principal political fractures in society. Moreover, when party systems are stable, political parties are more likely to build brands that are able to better articulate voter preferences and facilitate political participation.

On the other hand, the absence of stable party systems introduces uncertainty to the patterns of democratic competition. A lack of competition can leave voters with fewer political choices, thus contributing to a decrease of voter confidence in a democratic form of governance. Furthermore, party system instability could give way to other forms of electorate mobilization, such as populism and party substitutes, which are unbeneficial to a stable democracy.

Understanding civil conflict resolution in relation to current stability in Central America is also important because it too accentuates the importance of party systems to democratic stability. Although conflict is considered conducive to party building, there is still a clear lack of understanding of the process through which insurgency and counterinsurgency movements transform into political actors and participate in democratic elections. The exploration of this concept could provide significant insight into how party

¹⁰ Mainwaring and Scully, "Introduction," 2.

systems stabilize and strengthen or even consolidate democracies. In other words, a democracy that is stable, effective, legitimate and able to provide public goods, security, protection for human rights, and generate wealth and opportunity for its citizens.¹¹ Mainwaring and Scully said, “Institutionalizing a party system is important to the process of democratic consolidation....It is difficult to sustain modern mass democracy without an institutionalized party system.”¹²

From a policy perspective, the question of this research is significant because it could potentially provide a deeper explanation as to why certain democracies remain unstable. The current framework for U.S. policy in Latin America centers on “economic growth and prosperity, security, and democratic governance” within the region.¹³ For the past several decades, these three goals have arguably garnered significant concern for U.S. policy makers due to the uncertainty of democracy in places such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. Stable party systems are an essential component of effective democracies, which in turn can fulfill these three aforementioned U.S. policy goals; however, many Latin American countries continue to struggle with party system instability. To secure prosperity, security, and democratic governance, Latin American countries and the United States must learn to overcome this instability.

While this research does not presume to provide a comprehensive explanation to party system instability, it nonetheless aims to shed further light on a crucial and yet unexamined regional dynamic: the puzzling relationship between insurgency outcomes in Nicaragua and El Salvador and party system stability dynamics in present-day Central American societies. Arguably, stability is rooted in the outcomes of guerrilla movements and the role these outcomes have had in shaping party systems, which are “the basic building blocks of representative democracy.”¹⁴ Determining whether stable party systems

¹¹ Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 270–271.

¹² Mainwaring and Scully, “Introduction,” 1–2.

¹³ Mark P. Sullivan, *Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy Overview*, CRS Report No. IF10460 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 1, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10460.pdf>.

¹⁴ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, “Introduction,” 1.

influence a regime's likelihood to remain or not remain democratic could be extremely useful to U.S. foreign policy in the future.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review addresses the primary published works that bear on the dependent variable of this research, party system stability in Central America, starting with a discussion of party building processes and then tying this to the literature on party system dynamics. This review articulates the primary arguments of each source, discusses any gaps in the literature, and illustrates the major concepts and their relationships to party systems. It is important to note that throughout this thesis, terms such as insurgent, partisan, revolutionary, guerrilla, revolution, civil war, and insurgency are often used interchangeably and are meant to be synonymous.

1. Party Building

In their analysis of party building outcomes since the most recent wave of democratization in Latin America, Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck find that most efforts at party building in Latin America have resulted in failure.¹⁵ To explain the cases of successful party building, which include the FMLN and ARENA parties in El Salvador, the FSLN in Nicaragua, and the Democratic Revolutionary Party in Panama, they have developed a theory focused on the role of “conflict” and “organization inheritance” in party building.¹⁶

The authors' “conflict centered” theory argues that robust parties emerge from extraordinary conflict. Violence, repression, revolution, and civil war tend to generate a great deal of partisanship among organizations, which in turn, helps to build strong parties.¹⁷ This would certainly explain the FMLN and ARENA's ability to successfully cohere as political parties after the Salvadoran civil war. However, for these parties to take root, there are three overall steps that must be achieved. First, parties must build strong

¹⁵ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 1–3.

¹⁶ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 6–26.

¹⁷ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 3.

partisan identities and brands that identify with their constituents.¹⁸ Second, they must have a territorial organization that has “an organized presence on the ground.”¹⁹ Without a mobilizing physical presence, a party will begin to atrophy and will not survive in the long-term. Last, a successful party must achieve organizational cohesion. Without this cohesion, parties are susceptible to fragmentation and dissolution especially in times of crisis.²⁰

Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck further explain that successful party building can be accomplished through organizational inheritance. This pathway to successful party building argues that parties are more likely to succeed by building upon or “inheriting” preexisting party brands and organizations.²¹ For example, formed in the early 1980s, ARENA incorporated a great deal of the organizational branding from the former military regime, the Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN).²² The FSLN and the FMLN also took advantage of organizational inheritance by incorporating their previous brands and networks into their new party identities.²³

While offering a compelling starting point for thinking about the underlying reasons why the FMLN, ARENA, and FSLN have experienced significant success, this approach is limited in its capacity to account for why other political parties that were born from these same conflicts and have had access to organizational structures nonetheless have failed in their party building efforts. How do we explain the absence of a stable political party in opposition to the FSLN? Or Guatemala’s URNG’s inability to become established as a successful party despite its civil conflict roots?

Furthermore, these explanations broadly categorize parties for the sake of simplicity, but in the case of the FMLN, several distinct revolutionary groups formed its base. This caused a great number of cohesion problems that impaired the FMLN’s effectiveness as a political party during its infancy. Regarding the 1994 presidential

¹⁸ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 10.

¹⁹ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 11.

²⁰ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 12.

²¹ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 21.

²² Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 21.

²³ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 22.

election in El Salvador, Byrne said, “Internal divisions and a focus on the interests of the particular groups within the FMLN contributed to a lackluster campaign that did not seriously challenge ARENA’s political domination.”²⁴ Conflict does create partisanship, but the bonds that keep a group together during war may not be the same bonds that keep a group together in politics. Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck’s argument regarding conflict cohesion is compelling but arguably could not be applied fully to the case of the FMLN to explain its cohesion.²⁵

Two alternative approaches to explaining party building success also build on Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck’s theoretical framework to account for successful instances of party building in Latin America. The first, introduced by Holland, advances a theory focused on a “subnational electoral strategy” to explain why insurgent successor parties succeed or fail. Holland argues that, although conflict and organizational inheritance are important ingredients for successful party building, conflict can nonetheless deter moderate constituents from identifying with a party.²⁶ To appeal to these voters, an insurgent successor party should thus focus on winning subnational political offices. As Holland explains, “winning local elections creates a demonstration effect that makes voters more likely to identify with and support an insurgent successor party in national elections.”²⁷ Holland’s approach gives a strong bottom-up perspective that both builds upon other theories yet formulates its own designs.

The second approach, introduced by Loxton, seeks to explain the emergence of authoritarian successor parties. Loxton sets out to understand why authoritarian leaders sometimes succeed at building conservative political parties despite the “baggage”²⁸ and

²⁴ Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War: A Study of Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 214.

²⁵ Byrne, 214.

²⁶ Alisha Holland, “Insurgent Successor Parties: Scaling Down to Build a Party after War,” in *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*, ed. Steven Levitsky et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 274.

²⁷ Holland, 274.

²⁸ James Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties and the New Right in Latin America,” in *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*, ed. Steven Levitsky et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 257.

liabilities, such as civilian death squads, associated with authoritarian organizations.²⁹ He argues that conservative parties face significant hurdles for party building. These hurdles include both the issues traditionally faced by parties—brand development, building territorial organizations, and avoiding disintegration—as well as other obstacles that are specific to these particular types of parties.³⁰ In particular, because conservative parties’ core constituents are typically concentrated among small populations of upper society, Loxton argues that conservative parties must engage in tactics of “clientelism,” “crosscutting identities,” and “emphasize valence issues” to appeal to larger demographics; in other words, they need to “construct a multiclass electoral coalition.”³¹ Without this coalition, conservative parties would simply not be able to create a large enough voter base to compete. These obstacles make it difficult for any party to survive; however, through authoritarian inheritance, conservative parties can largely avoid these challenges.

In summary, party building is a challenge in Latin America. Most parties fail to achieve any substantial long-term success. Nonetheless, there are a few success stories, and four of these cases are in Central America. What explains this asymmetry in party building, and how were these particular parties able to succeed? Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck argue that conflict and organizational inheritance provided the cohesion, branding, and organization necessary to succeed. Holland and Loxton build upon the conflict and organization inheritance theory, but they argue that other factors, such as party strategies, explain successful party building. Holland argues that for the left, winning subnational elections was key to success. On the other hand, Loxton argues that for the right, building multiclass coalitions was key to party building success. Each of these theories provides a unique approach to understanding how political groups build successful parties. Each of these theories on party building processes is used to help explain the dynamics of party system stability.

²⁹ Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 58.

³⁰ Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties,” 247.

³¹ Loxton, 247–249.

2. Party System Stability

Mainwaring and Scully's work steps away from party building and sets out to define and conceptualize party systems in Latin America. They define a party system as a pattern of uniformly accepted rules and interactions during party competition.³² This implies that there must be at least two parties competing against each other to form a party system.³³ Their argument is not downplaying the role of parties; in fact, they argue that parties are the essential ingredient to democracy. According to the authors, parties are "fundamental actors in shaping the political landscape. In this sense, we emphasize that they not only reflect but also shape the social structure, economy, and culture."³⁴

Moreover, Mainwaring and Scully also argue that for party systems to stabilize and democracies to consolidate there must be a certain degree of institutionalization within a party system.³⁵ Also according to Mainwaring and Scully, for institutionalization to occur, a party system must meet four conditions. First, there must be stable interparty competition. Second, the parties must have stable roots in society. Third, all major political actors must recognize the established electoral process and each individual party as legitimate. Fourth, there should be party organizations that have well-defined rules and structures.³⁶ The degree to which a party system institutionalizes is determined by the degree to which it meets these four conditions. Variation occurs when parties diverge along the spectrum of these conditions. From this measurement, Mainwaring and Scully identify three types of varying party systems: institutionalized, inchoate, and hegemonic party systems. An institutionalized party system is a system that essentially meets all the conditions, which implies in turn that the system is relatively stable. An inchoate system is the opposite and lacks most of the criteria to make it stable. A hegemonic system is a party system in transition and somewhere between institutionalized and inchoate. It is either moving

³² Mainwaring and Scully, "Introduction," 1–2.

³³ Mainwaring and Scully, 4.

³⁴ Mainwaring and Scully, 3.

³⁵ Mainwaring and Scully, 3.

³⁶ Mainwaring and Scully, 4–6.

toward one or the other and usually lacks interparty competition.³⁷ El Salvador could be considered an institutionalized party system because of its relatively healthy interparty competition. An inchoate party system could arguably be used to define the current party system in Guatemala. In a hegemonic party system, other parties are allowed to exist but only as second-class citizens to a superior party.³⁸ This type of party system could describe the FSLN.

The literature of Mainwaring and Scully is crucial to defining the dependent variable for this proposal's main research question. Furthermore, this literature provides a strong theoretical foundation to understanding and measuring party system institutionalization in Latin America. This measurement of party system institutionalization is used to examine the systems of each case study included in this research.

Kenneth Roberts begins his approach to explaining party system stability by first addressing the reoccurring problem of party failure in Latin America and democracy's unexpected resiliency in the region despite this challenge. He explains that this appears to be a paradox because how else could democratic consolidation coincide with a crisis of political representation?³⁹ Unlike Mainwaring and Scully, Roberts attributes the variation of party system stability not to the conditions of institutionalization but to the institutional legacies of market reform and economic crisis that "marked the transition from import substitution industrialization (ISI) to neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s."⁴⁰

During this transitional period in Latin America from ISI to market-based structures, the ability of party systems to protect against market-based insecurities varied heavily.⁴¹ These insecurities dealigned party systems because parties could no longer

³⁷ Mainwaring and Scully, 17–21.

³⁸ Mainwaring and Scully, 20.

³⁹ Kenneth M. Roberts, "Market Reform, Programmatic (De)alignment, and Party System Stability in Latin America," *Comparative Political Studies*, 46, no. 11 (2012): 1422, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453449>.

⁴⁰ Roberts, "Market Reform," 1424.

⁴¹ Roberts, 1424.

project programmatic commitments. Voters lost confidence in established parties, and party systems were significantly “dislodged and reconfigured.”⁴² Following this initial period of dealignment, continued neoliberal reforms by conservative parties created an opposition on the left, which produced, for a time, a renewed form of programmatic partisan competition; however, emerging populists and leftist contenders adopted “bait-and-switch” reforms that only led to further party system instability regardless of the unremitting popular opposition to market liberalization.⁴³ In essence, Roberts’s theory bases party system stability on the “impact of market liberalization” and its role in affecting “programmatic alignment—or dealignment—of partisan competition.”⁴⁴

Roberts’s approach is important to understanding party system stability because it examines the economic history of Latin America in order to understand how its political cleavages and programmatic alignments contribute to party system stability. Akin to this approach, this research’s hypotheses also focus on historical events to understand party system stability; however, it differs in that it attributes the current state of party system stability in Central America not to market liberalization but to the distribution of political power following the outcomes of insurgency.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

As previously stated, the primary questions that this thesis addresses are how did the outcomes of revolutionary insurgencies shape party system outcomes in Central America, and why have some post-conflict scenarios resulted in stable democratic competition whereas others continue to survive on the edges of democracy? This thesis argues that variation in insurgent outcomes significantly shaped patterns of party system formation and stability in Central American countries. Although all Central American insurgencies were able to garner significant military and popular support and were profoundly consequential for their respective societies, they nonetheless differed significantly in their outcomes. For example, the FSLN insurgency in Nicaragua was able

⁴² Roberts, 1446.

⁴³ Roberts, 1446.

⁴⁴ Roberts, 1422.

to fully seize state power after it successfully overthrew the Somoza regime in 1979.⁴⁵ Contrarywise, El Salvador and Guatemala were both unsuccessful in seizing state power, but they were able to negotiate an end to their respective civil wars through peace agreements. However, their outcomes were much different. For the Guatemalan URNG, years of siege and infighting had paralyzed the insurgency, which made it “impossible to make the transition to a successful peacetime political party.”⁴⁶ In addition, the peace accords failed to deliver the promise of a “more inclusive democracy in Guatemala.... Indeed, the winners of the Guatemalan peace accords appear to be the country’s business elites.”⁴⁷ In other words, the outcome of the insurgency had been a bust, and the promise of the peace accords only seemed to strengthen the status quo. However, the insurgency in El Salvador was much more resilient.

This thesis posits that these insurgent outcomes shaped the trajectories of Central American societies after democratization. They did so by creating different patterns of distribution of political power that enabled some actors to organize effectively and hindered other actors’ capacity for political organization. The central hypothesis to this thesis question is that the insurgent outcomes of success in the case of Nicaragua have led to a disproportionate distribution of power that enabled the formation of an imbalanced political arena. In turn, this imbalance hindered party building efforts, particularly among the losing side of the cleavage, and has led to the overrepresentation of the winners of the conflict in the political system. In contrast, insurgent outcomes of stalemate that resulted in negotiation, as in the case of El Salvador, led to a “new party system [that] became more stable over time” because there was a forced distribution and balance of political power between parties.⁴⁸

The independent variable in this hypothesis is insurgent outcome. The dependent variable to this hypothesis is party system stability. The causal mechanism is how each

⁴⁵ Wickham-Crowley, “Winners, Losers and Also-Rans,” 137–138.

⁴⁶ Grandin, Levenson, and Oglesby, *Guatemala Reader*, 7.

⁴⁷ Grandin, Levenson, and Oglesby, 442–443.

⁴⁸ Roberts, “Historical Timing,” 72.

insurgency outcome transitioned and distributed political power throughout the party systems in each case study. The “hegemonic party system”⁴⁹ of the FSLN in Nicaragua is an example of success and the subsequent unbalanced distribution of power.⁵⁰ The V-Dem *Annual Democracy Report of 2018* indicates that over the past ten years, Nicaragua has moved from democracy to become an electoral autocracy.⁵¹ In the case of El Salvador, the insurgent outcome of stalemate between the FMLN and the Salvadoran military led to eventual negotiation. By negotiating and compromising, the FMLN became “less ideological and more pragmatic” and was able to continue fighting through politics instead of violence.⁵² This insurgency outcome appears to have created a balance of power. Roberts indicates that the parties in El Salvador had become stable “once the FMLN was incorporated into the electoral arena and partisan competition was clearly aligned along the left-right axis.”⁵³

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis examines the proposed hypotheses by comparing the case studies of Nicaragua and El Salvador. The research builds upon itself in three stages: the background to each insurgency, the outcomes of each insurgency, and the process of party building and party system institutionalization within the two countries.

The researcher chose the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador because each of these cases is within the same geographical region, each had an insurgent insurrection during the second wave of guerrilla movements in Latin America, and each emerged from authoritarianism; however, each case began at different times and ended with different outcomes. This provides two easily observable cases that have sufficient variation to complete a substantial analysis of the hypotheses. Other historical examples of insurgency

⁴⁹ Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties,” 251.

⁵⁰ V-Dem Institute, *Democracy for All? V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2018* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Gothenburg University, 2018), 48.

⁵¹ V-Dem Institute, *Democracy for All?*, 20.

⁵² Tommie Sue Montgomery, “Armed Struggle and Popular Resistance in El Salvador: The Struggle for Peace,” in *The Latin American Left: from the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, ed. Barry Carr and Steve Ellner (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 102.

⁵³ Roberts, “Historical Timing,” 72.

or party building may be drawn upon to give greater context to this thesis or to explain insurgent and counterinsurgent actions but are not substitutes as case studies.

The analytical approach to this research encompasses primarily a qualitative analysis but also relies on electoral data to measure each party system. The explanations of each insurgency, their backgrounds, their outcomes, and their contribution to power distribution takes a qualitative approach to adequately describe the events and environments that contributed to the formation and outcomes of these civil conflicts.

To assess the transitional period from insurgency outcomes to democracy and how the varying degrees of political power were distributed within each case study, this research takes a qualitative approach to substantiate the claims that the different insurgent outcomes directly correlate to the current state of party system stability within Nicaragua and El Salvador. The types of sources used to evaluate this thesis's hypotheses specifically focus on the primary and secondary sources regarding elections, formal negotiations, peace talks, and the politics of the region. The remainder of the materials needed to satisfy the major research question were collected through scholarly books and articles relating to politics, social movements, and history in Central America.

The final analysis of party building and party systems also employs a qualitative approach. The combined theoretical work of Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, Holland, Roberts, and Mainwaring and Scully provides the foundational explanation as to why parties succeed or fail, how parties emerge, and how party systems institutionalize to create political stability. The theories of these authors are exclusive to Latin America, which makes them especially relevant to the current political climate within the region.

Finally, the author uses an analysis of electoral results following the outcomes of insurgency to trace party system dynamics and assess the degree of party system stability for each case study. Since the institutionalization of party systems denotes stability,⁵⁴ presidential, legislative, and municipal electoral results control and measure for the dependent variable of party system stability.

⁵⁴ Mainwaring and Scully, "Introduction," 1.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis is organized into four chapters. Chapter I has introduced the topics of insurgency and party systems in Latin America as well as the observed correlation between the variation of insurgency outcomes and the current state of party system stability within the region of Central America. Chapter II consists of the first case study, Nicaragua. This chapter provides the historical background to the FSLN insurgency, its conflict with the Somoza regime, and the insurgency's successful revolutionary outcome in 1979. The chapter then examines the FSLN's transition from insurgency to political party and in what manner the FSLN's successful revolution has affected the political power balance between the FSLN and competing political parties over the past forty years.

Chapter III consists of the second case study, El Salvador, and provides the historical background and motivations to the conflict between El Salvador's authoritarian government and the FMLN insurgency from 1980 to 1992. The chapter then explores the emergence of both the authoritarian successor party, ARENA, in 1981 and the FMLN as a political party in 1992. It also explores how the 1992 peace agreement fostered interparty competition, and how this has led to a relative stable party system stability within El Salvador for the past three decades.

Chapter IV, the final chapter, consists of a summary of this paper's main argument. In addition, it outlines the principal findings of this research and its significance to the current literature. Finally, it concludes with a brief examination of any gaps or shortfalls and provides a brief recommendation on the future direction of this research.

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II. FROM INSURGENCY TO CAUDILLO: THE CASE OF NICARAGUA

Nicaragua is currently facing a political crisis. In April of 2018, massive protests erupted throughout the country in defiance of the current administration of President Daniel Ortega after several groups of armed pro-government shock troops crushed demonstrators protesting the recently announced reforms to Nicaragua's pension system.⁵⁵ Consequently, over the past two years, more than 300 people have been killed, over 700 more have been detained, and nearly 2000 injured as a result of government backlash.⁵⁶ Additionally, thousands of Nicaraguans have fled the country to avoid the political violence.

A closer examination of the current state of affairs in Nicaragua reveals that a severe imbalance of political power persists in Nicaragua, and this has contributed to the conflict. Whereas the FSLN, with Daniel Ortega at its helm, managed to make a successful transition from guerrilla insurgency to political party and gradually became entrenched in the party system, opposition parties have remained remarkably weak and unable to form any enduring opposition.

It is within this context of uncontested rule that Daniel Ortega, who first ruled Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990 and again from 2007 to the present, has managed to concentrate his executive powers under the FSLN political party to the degree of an autocrat. Since his election in 2007, Ortega has gradually closed his grip on power by removing all the checks and balances to his presidential power. With a current 79 percent party majority in Nicaragua's National Assembly, Ortega can literally "legislate by decree, and run for indefinite re-election."⁵⁷ In 2019, the international nongovernmental organization, Human Rights Watch, in its yearly report stated,

⁵⁵ "Downward Spiral: Nicaragua's Worsening Crisis," *BBC News*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44398673>.

⁵⁶ Gabriela Selser, "OAS Rights Body: Over 70K Nicaraguans in Exile Due to Crisis," *AP News*, September 20, 2019, <https://apnews.com/67a0602ab0064f949649a47635425a51>.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019: Events of 2018* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 425, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019#>.

An enormous concentration of power by the executive has allowed President Daniel Ortega's government to commit egregious abuses against critics and opponents with complete impunity.... Since taking office in 2007, Ortega's government has aggressively dismantled all institutional checks on presidential power. Stacked with his supporters, the Electoral Council barred political parties and removed opposition lawmakers.⁵⁸

In essence, under the umbrella of the FSLN party, Daniel Ortega has come to resemble the very dictatorship that he helped depose over 40 years ago.⁵⁹

How did the Nicaraguan party system become so lopsided? Why do opposition parties struggle to create a sustained political presence while the FSLN remains a constant contender? In the span of a single decade, the opposition to the FSLN has become almost nonexistent. In the 2016 presidential election, the next five contenders combined only garnered 27.55 percent of the national vote in comparison to Daniel Ortega's astounding 72.44 percent.⁶⁰ Even in the past when opposition parties have been successful in both the presidential and National Assembly elections, their presence did not endure. This lopsidedness is arguably contributing to Nicaragua's current political tensions. Levitsky and Cameron note,

Where [parties] are weak, class actors tend to have less of a stake in electoral politics, legislatures are less able to oversee the executive, antisystem candidates are more common and more successful, and societies are less well equipped either to resist authoritarian encroachments or to remove autocratic governments.⁶¹

This is a situation that Nicaragua unquestionably faces today.

The central hypothesis in this case study of Nicaragua is that current and persistent imbalances of the Nicaraguan party system are a product of the outcome of the insurgent revolutionary process that culminated in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution. By clearing the

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, 425.

⁵⁹ "From Revolutionary Leader to Opposition Hate Figure," *BBC*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15544315>.

⁶⁰ "Country Profile: Nicaragua," Election Guide, accessed January 18, 2020, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/156/>.

⁶¹ Steven Levitsky and Maxwell A. Cameron, "Democracy without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003): 5.

political arena of its previously dominant actors and growing within that political vacuum with a vanguardist and inclusionary project, the FSLN established a political hegemony, leaving little discursive, organizational, and institutional space for political parties in the opposition to grow and consolidate. It is the resulting disproportionate concentration of power in the hands of the FSLN that ultimately led to the autocratization of Nicaragua.

It is important to recognize that the creation of the FSLN political party and its success as an insurgency are not detached incidents, nor are they disconnected from the greater historical and political account of Central America. In fact, a number of historical, political, and social conditions would be necessary for such an insurgency to unfold and take place. Thus, it would be unjust to paint the rise of the FSLN and its transition to a political party as an isolated event. The successful outcome, and even the foundations of the revolution in 1979, came as a result of decades of political conflict within the region; therefore, it is useful to review the history of political power and insurgency in Nicaragua so as to grasp why the FSLN emerged and how its emergence has influenced Nicaragua's political landscape.

A. BACKGROUND TO POWER AND INSURGENCY IN NICARAGUA

Sadly, the struggle for power through insurgency in Nicaragua began only a short time after it became independent from Spain in 1821 and separated from the United Provinces of Central America in 1838.⁶² Starting in 1853 and continuing until 1933, the U.S. militarily invaded and occupied Nicaragua at least eight different times under the guise of the “protecting” American business interests and lives during times of political disorder, while at the same time “overthrowing and installing successive governments.”⁶³ Although the U.S. military could not have known it at the time, these interventions had a profound effect on Nicaragua's political destiny and became a significant contributing factor to the rise of insurgent movements in Nicaragua. Once the U.S. military's presence and influence transformed into outright power through proxy politicians, insurgency and

⁶² Saul Landau, *The Guerrilla Wars of Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 13.

⁶³ *Al Jazeera*, “Nicaragua: An Unfinished Revolution,” YouTube video, posted by Josh Alper, April 9, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuBNV3lpdZY&t=228s>.

anti-imperialist rhetoric became common, and sometimes the only, instruments among Nicaraguans to challenge the established political power and protest U.S. interference within the country. This is a trend that continued for over a century and was later echoed by the FSLN.

The last occupation by the United States began in 1926 after the marines returned to Nicaragua, only a year after departing from their last occupation, to restore stability to a rapidly deteriorating political environment; however, by this point, the limits of endurance for the people of Nicaragua had been reached.⁶⁴ The United States and its proxy government had to go, and the political power returned to the people. As a result, a young guerrilla leader by the name of Augusto Cesar Sandino began his crusade to remove the U.S. marines from Nicaragua. For over five years, Sandino and his fellow guerrillas evaded, harassed, and sabotaged the U.S. forces with “small unit, hit-and-run, rural warfare tactics” with relative success, despite the superior training and technology of the marines.⁶⁵ By 1933, the marines finally withdrew in part due to Sandino’s efforts but also to appease a weary U.S. Congress tired of military occupation in Nicaragua.⁶⁶

Content enough that the marines had left, Sandino ended his war against the United States; however, the newly formed and U.S. trained Nicaraguan National Guard would not allow Sandino’s actions to go unpunished.⁶⁷ In 1934, National Guardsmen assassinated Sandino. Without Sandino’s continued opposition, the mastermind behind the assassination, Anastasio Somoza (Tacho), a member of the National Guard, seized complete control over Nicaragua after strong arming the then-president, Juan Bautista Sacasa, out of office and installed an oppressive family dictatorship that would last for the next 40 years.⁶⁸ In time, and after consolidating most of Nicaragua’s political and military power, there was almost no distinction between the Somoza regime and the state. This

⁶⁴ David Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society* (New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988), 18–19.

⁶⁵ Close, *Nicaragua*, 20.

⁶⁶ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 17.

⁶⁷ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 20–22.

⁶⁸ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 18.

came at a great cost to the people of Nicaragua. Close said, “Tacho used the power he so assiduously amassed to enrich himself, his family, and his friends while leaving the country as impoverished as ever.... For him ... politics was a violent business to be carried on by force, fraud, and coercion.”⁶⁹

Although a façade of elections did occur and some provisional presidents did assume office during the Somoza dynasty, there was no question that the Somoza family ruled the country.⁷⁰ After Anastasio Somoza’s death by assassination in 1956, his elder son Luis assumed control of the country until 1963 and then passed control to his youngest son, Anastasio Jr. (Tachito), until his overthrow in 1979.⁷¹ Once again, oppressed Nicaraguans were left with little choice other than to rise up as an insurgency to recapture their political destiny; thus was the birth of the FSLN.

B. FSLN INSURGENCY

Initial attempts to form a strong opposition to the Somoza regime after Sandino’s death foundered for several decades; however, the success of Fidel Castro’s M-26 movement in 1959 soon sparked a renewed surge of guerilla and insurgent “collective action” against authoritarianism and perceived U.S. imperialism throughout the region.⁷² As a result, inspired by a blend of Marxism, Sandino’s nationalism, and Castro’s military success, revolutionary groups in Nicaragua formed the Sandinista National Liberation Front, more commonly referred to as the FSLN or Sandinistas, and starting in 1961, the group began the slow process of chipping away at the Somoza dictatorship.⁷³ However, progress was slow due in large part to the obstacles of the well-trained National Guard and an almost endless supply of financing for counterinsurgency from the U.S. government, which was determined not to let Nicaragua become a second Cuba.

⁶⁹ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 25.

⁷⁰ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 18.

⁷¹ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 19–21.

⁷² Wickham-Crowley, “Winners, Losers, and Also-Rans,” 135–139.

⁷³ Stephen M. Gorman, “Power and Consolidation in the Nicaraguan Revolution,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 13, no. 1 (1981): 134.

In spite of these obstacles, a convergence of increasing opposition to the Somoza regime and increasing support for the FSLN by the general public in the 1970s enabled the FSLN insurgency to turn the tide in its favor. Siphoning off the international relief funds after the 1972 Managua earthquake, a rigged election in 1974, the 1978 assassination of a prominent journalist, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro (who openly spoke out against the Somoza regime), and the continued oppression of the Nicaraguan people in general were reasons enough to finally galvanize the population against Tachito Somoza, delegitimize his ability to govern, and give the FSLN the popular and military support it needed to topple the regime.⁷⁴ “Catholics who believed that revolution was the only path to Christ’s justice,”⁷⁵ the middle class, the business class,⁷⁶ the bourgeois, and “most of the leading political and labor organizations” now had a common enemy, and all came together in opposition.⁷⁷ Even the United States could no longer ignore the blatant human rights abuses and withdrew its support despite its disinclinations over a immanent communist takeover. Wickham Crowley comments, “In response, the revolutionary opposition secured cross-class and multi-institutional allies and support, leading to a final scenario in which a nation overthrew a dictator bereft in the end of all but decaying military support.”⁷⁸

By the summer of 1979, the isolated Somoza regime faced collapse. The control over Nicaragua through the U.S. supported dictatorship was finally at an end. In June 1979, the battle for Managua commenced and a convergence of three critical variables, as described by Landau, ensured the National Guard could not prevail. First, Somoza’s oppression and corrupt actions had irrevocably delegitimized his government past the point of no return. Second, a coalition of businesses, institutions, and Nicaraguans from all classes and political backgrounds came together in equal desire to oppose the regime. Third, with increased military support from Cuba and the Nicaraguan people, the FSLN

⁷⁴ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 25–30.

⁷⁵ Landau, 25.

⁷⁶ Wickham-Crowley, “Winners, Losers and Also-Rans,” 135–138.

⁷⁷ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 136.

⁷⁸ Wickham-Crowley, “Winners, Losers and Also-Rans,” 162.

had united its factions and gained the necessary military strength to oppose the regime.⁷⁹ Consequently, in July 1979, the Somoza regime fell, and the FSLN took back the political power and sovereignty that the Nicaraguan people had lost so long ago. Landau explains,

On 17 July the Somoza family fled to Miami, Florida. Without Somoza's presence, there was nothing to hold the Guard together. Overwhelmed and demoralized, the once invincible National Guard collapsed. Some units surrendered to FSLN commanders, others fled as one or in ragtag fashion to borders north and south. On 19 July the Sandinistas held State power.⁸⁰

One of the commandants of the FSLN, Humberto Ortega declared, "We took power by arms, and it should be clear who has power in Nicaragua today."⁸¹ With power firmly in its hands, the FSLN now had the power to remake Nicaragua's political machinery, and although the FSLN was genuine in its desire to pursue a government based on "the logic of the majority," this would come at the expense of a disproportionate concentration of power in the hands of the FSLN.⁸²

C. FSLN POWER CONSOLIDATION AND PARTY SYSTEM STABILITY

Prior to the successful outcome of the Sandinista's revolution, Nicaraguans knew neither democracy nor autonomy. Domination of the state by caudillos, oligarchs, and tyrants had created a political mechanism meant to only serve those in power, and sovereignty, or any other form of desire to self-govern, only existed as an illusion projected through the resolve of U.S. influence. Consequently, the political parties and anyone that would have naturally taken up politics to govern in a normal democratic society had become "politically inert and inept" through repression during the Somoza time period.⁸³ In this environment, party building for conservatives, liberals, socialists, or Marxists was considerably difficult. Most parties had simply become fronts designed to give the

⁷⁹ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 25–27.

⁸⁰ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 33.

⁸¹ Gorman, "Power and Consolidation," 133.

⁸² Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 1.

⁸³ Close, 108.

impression that electoral politics and party competition existed in Nicaragua.⁸⁴ Close explains, “Forty years of giving up the right to participate in politics in exchange for the right to wring easy profits from the working class and peasantry had taken their toll.”⁸⁵

The outcome of a successful insurgency by the FSLN not only reversed this “inertia of 450 years of oligarchical rule” but also changed how political power would be distributed throughout Nicaraguan society and how these past and future parties would participate.⁸⁶ In other words, the revolution gave the Sandinistas both the power and the means to create a new political mechanism. One that would shift power away from the former elites and back to the majority but also one that would institutionalize the FSLN as a political vanguard. Although opposition parties were allowed within this new political mechanism, their initial lack of organization, electoral mobilization, structure, and cohesion after 40 years of atrophy had given the FSLN all the more advantage to become the dominant political party.⁸⁷ In addition, without elections, traditional political parties struggled to emerge because they were deprived of “both a possible independent political base in the new government and a public forum for policy debates.”⁸⁸ It would not be until after the announcement of the elections in 1980 and the passing of party and electoral laws in 1982 and 1984 that these parties would again encounter a window of opportunity for establishing themselves.

In the meantime, the takeover of governmental control by the FSLN began immediately. Its goals were the “urgent task of its political, economic, and military consolidation ... in order to move on to greater revolutionary transformations.”⁸⁹ In other words, it wanted to consolidate power in order to realize its “in-depth economic and social

⁸⁴ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 18.

⁸⁵ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 108.

⁸⁶ Close, 1.

⁸⁷ Close, 107–108.

⁸⁸ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 148.

⁸⁹ Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional and U.S. Department of State, “*The 72-Hour Document*”: *The Sandinista Blueprint for Constructing Communism in Nicaragua* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1986), 6.

transformations.”⁹⁰ Although there was some concern that the FSLN may not survive as a political party and that it would have to “surrender or in some fashion lose power to the national bourgeoisie,” that did not happen.⁹¹ The Somoza family had literally become the state, and without the regime, there was virtually no one to challenge the FSLN’s premeditated strategy to establish itself as the vanguard party. An internal FSLN strategy document from October 1979 titled by the U.S. State Department as the “72 Hour Document” illustrates this lack of challengers in the wake of Somoza’s overthrow. It states, “the selection and organization of the government was a relatively easy task, as it did not have to be negotiated with the opposition parties of the bourgeoisie, but merely involved appointing patriotic figures who were somewhat representative.”⁹² By establishing an early hegemony over a new government by voiding the constitution and dissolving Nicaragua’s congress only one day after the fall of Somoza,⁹³ the FSLN was able to avoid any remaining “entrenched interests” or desires for “power sharing.”⁹⁴ Indubitably, this quick action gave the FSLN an early upper hand and also allowed it to dictate the rules of the game and consolidate early governmental control.

Besides the successful seizure of power itself, a significant contributing factor to this early concentration of power was the FSLN’s forward-looking approach in preparation of a government takeover and the use of its organizational structures to quickly transition from insurgency to political party. In the minds of the FSLN leadership, there was never any question that the insurgency would be used as both a mechanism for overthrowing the Somoza regime and for creating a revolutionary government. The 1969 FSLN document, the *Historical Program*, demonstrated this desire to use the FSLN as both an armed and political apparatus. It says,

⁹⁰ Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional and U.S. Department of State, “*The 72-Hour Document*,” 6.

⁹¹ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 133.

⁹² Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional and U.S. Department of State, “*The 72-Hour Document*,” 5.

⁹³ U.S. Embassy Managua, “GRN Begins Issuing Decrees,” telegram to U.S. Secretary of State, July 21, 1979.

⁹⁴ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 133.

The FSLN is a politico-military organization whose strategic objective is to take political power by destroying the military and bureaucratic apparatus of the dictatorship and to establish a revolutionary government based on the worker-peasant alliance and the convergence of all the patriotic anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic forces, in the country.⁹⁵

Because there was nearly no distinction between the armed and political aspects of the FSLN, the transition to political party was nearly seamless and arguably began even before Somoza's overthrow as demonstrated through the FSLN's use of early political organizations.

In addition to the FSLN's forward-looking approach, the FSLN had also anticipated the need for organizational structure both during the insurgency and after taking control of the government in order to consolidate power; therefore, in 1978, the FSLN leadership created the National Directorate.⁹⁶ Since the FSLN had no "supreme leader when it took power," this organization, made up of nine FSLN leaders, acted as the controlling decision authority and placed several members in charge of different sectors of the new government (see Table 1).⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Sandinista National Liberation Front, "Historical Program," in *Conflict in Nicaragua: A Multidimensional Perspective*, ed. Jiri Valenta and Esperanza Duran (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 321.

⁹⁶ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 114.

⁹⁷ Close, 114.

Table 1. FSLN National Directorate⁹⁸

Tomás Borge Martinez	Minister of the Interior
Victor Tirado Lopez	
Daniel Ortega Saavedra	Member of the Government of National Reconstruction
Humberto Ortega Saavedra	Minister of Defense & Commander of the Popular Sandinista Army
Henry Ruiz Hernandez	Minister of Economic Planning
Jaime Wheelock Roman	Minister of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform
Bayardo Arce Castano	President of the Council of State
Carlos Nunez Tellez	
Luís Carrión Cruz	Vice Minister of Defense & Second in Command of Popular Sandinista Army

This not only gave the FSLN sole decision authority over the new government but also the ability to consolidate both political and military power. Political power was consolidated through a skillful treatment of both the private sector and bourgeois political parties. In 1979, the National Directorate announced the formation of the Governing Junta of National Reconstruction, which had two members of the bourgeoisie, two members of moderate social democrats, and one leftist.⁹⁹ In 1980, the National Directorate also created a semi-legislative, 47-seat Council of State, which incorporated members of all political groups.¹⁰⁰ This incorporation of all different political backgrounds into these two governmental bodies allowed a degree of “limited but real pluralism” to enter the new government although it was always under the FSLN’s firm control.¹⁰¹ By neither excluding the potential competitors nor allowing them to take control of key governmental positions, the National Directorate “avoided premature political polarization between right and left”

⁹⁸ Adapted from Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 141.

⁹⁹ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 138.

¹⁰⁰ Gorman, 142.

¹⁰¹ David Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 20.

while at the same time allowing their participation to legitimize the new government.¹⁰² The military was consolidated by replacing the National Guard with the Popular Sandinista Army. By placing Sandinista combat veterans into positions of military leadership and by injecting revolutionary indoctrination into its ranks, the National Directorate ensured that the consolidation of military power also remained in the hands of the FSLN.¹⁰³

The National Directorate also focused on popular organization as a means to consolidate political support and build the FSLN party. Sandinista Defense Committees, Sandinista Youth organizations, the Association of Nicaraguan Women, and the Association of Rural Workers were just a few of the organizations that became significant political forces toward this effort.¹⁰⁴ For example, the Sandinista Defense Committees promoted and implemented neighborhood infrastructure projects and public welfare programs.¹⁰⁵ This group was by far the biggest popular organization with an estimated half a million members spread out across the entire country by the early 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Many of the same youth from these organizations implemented a literacy campaign starting in March 1980, and they “enjoyed a ground-swell of popular support” across the nation.¹⁰⁷

This quick governmental organization and consolidation was so skillful that by January of 1980, only six months after taking power, the National Directorate had created a national reconstruction plan “nationalized export, exploitation of natural resources and domestic banking; expropriated over 180 industrial and commercial companies, and nearly 50 percent of the arable land; and initiated a number of social services designed to improve health and welfare among the masses.”¹⁰⁸ Although the FSLN’s vanguardism and consolidation of both political and military power may have appeared alarming, it was still a more “open, tolerant, and pluralistic system than any prior

¹⁰² Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 148.

¹⁰³ Gorman, 142–146.

¹⁰⁴ Gorman, 146–147.

¹⁰⁵ Gorman, 146–148.

¹⁰⁶ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 117.

¹⁰⁷ Gorman, “Power and Consolidation,” 148.

¹⁰⁸ Gorman, 139.

socialist revolutionary state.”¹⁰⁹ In essence, the FSLN had become the hegemonic political party by quickly consolidating power and garnering popular support through its programs. By allowing the opposition to participate in but not control the new government, the FSLN was able to avoid early polarization. This left the already weakened political parties reluctant to formulate into competitors. This consolidation of power and hegemony by the FSLN could not have been achieved if it had not succeeded as an insurgency.

D. 1980–1990

Although the FSLN was successful in quickly consolidating both political and military power under its control within the first few years following the revolution, and was able to establish its dominance as the hegemonic party, it did not intend to become another dictatorship. It simply wanted to ensure the revolution ideals carried forward. As Close said, “Though the revolutionaries did not seek to monopolize state power, they did want to effectively dominate the operations of government.”¹¹⁰ Consequently, when pressure began to mount from a quickly escalating U.S.-backed counterrevolutionary war and from civic opposition brought on by conservatives, business elites, and the Catholic Church, the FSLN did not resort to death squads, dictatorship, or imprisonments to maintain power as had been done in El Salvador and Guatemala; it simply transitioned the political machinery to force Nicaraguans to further legitimize the government.¹¹¹ This came in the form of elections and democracy and an end to the radical phase of the revolution; however, this does raise the question why would a successful insurgency, whose sole interest was safeguarding its revolutionary legacy and egalitarian society, jeopardize its monopoly on power?

Considering this conundrum, Close posited, “Starting a country’s democratic history with a revolutionary government demands an explanation, because revolutionary regimes do not observe the tenets of constitutional democracy.... They have less interest

¹⁰⁹ Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Close, 20.

¹¹¹ Close, 20–23.

in structures and are suspicious of restraints on their power.”¹¹² In response to this conundrum, both opponents and proponents to the FSLN would argue that the FSLN’s goal in holding elections was not necessarily a pursuit of democracy itself but instead to gain international legitimacy¹¹³ for the right to govern in the face of mounting pressure from the U.S.-backed counterrevolutionary movement, which began almost immediately after the Sandinistas took power, and “that a competitive election with heavy turnout would help deter a U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua.”¹¹⁴ This would also further strengthen the FSLN position as the vanguard party. In other words, the FSLN was arguably more interested in consolidating its legitimacy and power than democracy. According to Close, “Curiously, however, it was only after moving the state in a more liberal direction in 1984 that the FSLN formally ruled totally alone.”¹¹⁵

This complete domination through democracy came in the November 4, 1984 election (see Table 2). The Political Parties Law of 1982 allowed practically any party to formulate and compete as long as it did not propose returning to a Somoza state, and the Electoral Law of 1984 governed how the elections would be run. The two laws provided both the means for the emergence of a competitive party system and established the format for the new government. The Council of State was to be abolished and replaced with a system comprising of a president, vice president, and a 96 seat National Assembly.¹¹⁶ Surprisingly, the passing of these two laws also opened up the possibility that the Sandinistas could be voted out of power, but because that prospect seemed unlikely given its current hegemonic position, the FSLN lawmakers conceded on this point.¹¹⁷ This

¹¹² David Close and Kalowatie Deonandan, eds., *Undoing Democracy: The Politics of Electoral Caudillismo* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 6.

¹¹³ Central Intelligence Agency, *The 1984 Elections in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1984), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86M00886R001400130043-9.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ “The Electoral Process in Nicaragua: Domestic and International Influences,” Latin American Studies Association, November 19, 1984, i, <https://lasaweb.org/uploads/reports/electoralprocessnicaragua.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 20.

¹¹⁶ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 133–134.

¹¹⁷ Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 24.

decision would later constrain the FSLN's ability to remain the vanguard, but it would not limit its ability to remain as the dominate political party.

With the passing of the two laws, the opposition was finally given the room to operate, and other political parties began to formulate and emerge. By 1984, eleven parties had legally registered and six competed in the November election, although none could amass the strength to truly compete against the FSLN.¹¹⁸ This was obviously in part due to the FSLN's "overwhelming domination of Nicaragua's political life"¹¹⁹ through the FSLN's control over governmental agencies, police and military forces, and popular organizations—as pointed out by the election observing delegation, the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). This lack of competition was also due to what Close referred to as a lack of organization and a sure constituency by the opposition.¹²⁰ In addition, each party struggled with its own problems of formation. The Independent Liberal Party (PLI) and the Democratic Conservative Party (PCD) were too committed to conservative "caudillo-like" politics to garner any significant support, and the Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC), the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), the Nicaraguan Communist Party (PCN), and the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement (MAP) were either too weak, poor, or extreme to become established parties.¹²¹ In addition, the PSN, PLI, and PPSC had been previously associated with the FSLN in an alliance called the Revolutionary Patriotic Front and were thus too closely related to the FSLN to attract sufficient support to oppose the already established revolutionary hegemonic position of the FSLN as the vanguard party.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Latin American Studies Association, "The Electoral Process in Nicaragua," 8.

¹¹⁹ Latin American Studies Association, 23.

¹²⁰ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 127.

¹²¹ Close, 127–128.

¹²² Close, 127.

Table 2. Nicaragua's Election Results, 1984¹²³

Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
FSLN	67.0	61
PCD	14.0	14
PLI	9.6	9
PPSC	5.6	6
PCN	1.5	2
PSN	1.3	2
MAP	1.0	2

Although some would criticize the 1984 elections as being unfair, the unbiased report of the LASA delegation concluded otherwise, even calling them an “impressive beginning” for Nicaragua’s democracy.¹²⁴ The FSLN simply had consolidated too much power as a result of the revolution, and the opposition parties were still too weak to change the balance of power. Democracy only further legitimized and strengthened this conclusion. As Close remarked, “The FSLN’s legitimacy as leader of the revolution, its extensive organization, and its record of producing benefits for the majority added up to too much to overcome in one election.”¹²⁵

E. 1990–2006

The 1990 election would appear to disprove the theory that the successful insurgency allowed the FSLN to consolidate enough power to remain the indefinite hegemonic political party in Nicaragua. On February 25, 1990, Violeta Chamorro under the National Opposition Union (UNO) coalition, won 54.7 percent of the vote and 51 seats in the National Assembly over Daniel Ortega’s 40.8 percent of the vote and 39 seats under the FSLN (see Table 3).¹²⁶ Some academics would even go as far as to call it a failure by

¹²³ Adapted from Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 25.

¹²⁴ Latin American Studies Association, “The Electoral Process in Nicaragua,” ii.

¹²⁵ Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, 137.

¹²⁶ Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 29.

the Sandinistas to institutionalize the revolution; however, if one looks deeper than just the election results, it becomes clear that the FSLN may have lost popularity and control over the government in 1990, but it did not lose its title as the predominate political party in Nicaragua.¹²⁷

Table 3. Nicaragua's Election Results, 1990¹²⁸

Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
UNO	54.7	51
FSLN	40.8	39
Other	4.2	2

First, Chamorro's UNO was a coalition of parties and not an organized coherent opposition party. This meant that anyone and everyone who simply wanted change in Nicaragua voted for the UNO ticket. This may have worked to unseat the FSLN as the holders of power, but it did not build an ideological coherent opposition party capable of competing much past one election cycle, nor is it a recipe for good governance. Furthermore, the fact that the only way the opposition could defeat the FSLN was through a coalition proves the fact that most parties were still weak, and none could compete on its own. On the other hand, the FSLN still "remained the largest single party" in Nicaragua following the elections.¹²⁹ Close explains,

[T]he UNO ... was a fourteen-party grab bag of anti-Sandinistas of all stripes, from Communists to Conservatives. The unwieldy group never became a fully fledged governing coalition, let alone a unified party, and eventually turned against the woman who had led the ticket to power. As a result, the Chamorro administration's six-year term was marked by

¹²⁷ Close, 31.

¹²⁸ Adapted from Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 29.

¹²⁹ Close, 41.

continual conflict between the president and the National Assembly, producing perhaps the weakest executive in the nation's history.¹³⁰

Secondly, the FSLN had simply fallen prey to number of detrimental crises that had exhausted the party's popular support. The main culprit to this misfortune was the high cost of fighting the U.S.-backed Contra war and its effects on the Nicaraguan economy and morale. During this time, the government was forced to implement a military draft and spend over half the national budget on defense alone in order to keep the Contras at bay.¹³¹ By 1990, the economy had shrunk by 14 percent, and inflation had reached a staggering 33,500 percent.¹³² In addition, the end of the Cold War in general made it difficult for revolutionary groups to maintain their popularity in a unipolar international system where the United States had free reign to pressure socialist governments no longer supported through Soviet patronage.¹³³ All these factors combined contributed to the FSLN's electoral defeat in 1990; however, even with all of these setbacks, the party was still able to secure 40 percent of the vote. Moreover, unlike the opposition parties, the FSLN had a dense organizational network, loyal partisans, and an established ideology. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that although the FSLN was still struggling with popularity and weakened by a splinter break away party (the Sandinista Renovationist Movement) in 1995, it was still deeply engrained in both the culture and politics of Nicaragua, whereas the UNO had faded into nonexistence.¹³⁴

The 1996 and 2001 elections (see Table 4) were also electoral defeats for the FSLN, but once again, if one looks past the vote count, it becomes clear that the other parties or coalitions still struggled to match the FSLN endurance as the most established party. It is

¹³⁰ David Close, "Undoing Democracy in Nicaragua," in *Undoing Democracy: The Politics of Electoral Caudillismo*, eds. David Close and Kalowatie Deonandan (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 7.

¹³¹ Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 228.

¹³² Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 27.

¹³³ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 227.

¹³⁴ Katherine Hoyt, "Parties and Pacts in Contemporary Nicaragua," in *Undoing Democracy: The Politics of Electoral Caudillismo*, ed. David Close and Kalowatie Deonandan (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 24.

true that the FSLN had evolved significantly by this point in its history and had to “reconsider ... its organizational composition, its discourse, and its new strategy as an opposition party” following its defeat in 1990; however, where it would evolve to maintain its consistent strength other parties would collapse.¹³⁵

Table 4. Nicaragua’s Election Results, 1996–2001¹³⁶

1996 Election		
Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
Liberal Alliance	51.03	42
FSLN	37.75	37
Other	11.22	15
2001 Election		
Party ¹³⁷	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
PLC	55.50	49
FSLN	43.00	39
Other	1.50	4

For instance, in 1996, the Liberal Alliance’s candidate, Arnaldo Alemán, won the presidential election. but did so as part of another coalition, “which brought most of Nicaragua’s Liberals on to one ticket,” and not as a party.¹³⁸ Much like the UNO, the Liberal Alliance became the “leading anti-Sandinista political force,” but it was by no means ideological or cohesive.¹³⁹ By 2001, the Liberal Alliance had all but faded back into its subsequent parties.¹⁴⁰ The only real party that appears to have beaten the FSLN in an election without resorting to a coalition was the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) in 2001 under presidential candidate Enrique Bolanos. The PLC had previously been a part of the

¹³⁵ Salvador Martí i Puig and Claire Wright, “The Adaptation of the FSLN: Daniel Ortega’s Leadership and Democracy in Nicaragua,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 52, no. 4 (2010): 86.

¹³⁶ Adapted from Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 176.

¹³⁷ Election Guide, “Country Profile: Nicaragua.”

¹³⁸ Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 175.

¹³⁹ Close, “Undoing Democracy in Nicaragua,” 10–11.

¹⁴⁰ Close, 10–11.

Liberal Alliance and traced its roots to the now defunct Somoza Liberal party but prior to the 1990s had teetered on the verge of extinction.¹⁴¹ Its resurgence in the mid-1990s made it the first party that appeared able to challenge the FSLN organizationally; however, it too struggled with ideology and later fractured among other liberal parties causing a split in the liberal vote in 2006 (see Table 5).¹⁴² By the time the 2006, 2011, and 2016 elections had passed, the PLC had shrunk into almost nonexistence whereas the FSLN had maintained its base, regained its strength and even reasserted its position as the hegemonic political party.

Table 5. Nicaragua's Election Results, 2006–2016¹⁴³

2006 Election		
Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
FSLN	38.10	38
Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance	29.00	22
PLC	26.20	25
Other	6.70	5
2011 Election		
Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
FSLN	62.50	63
PLI	31.00	27
PLC	5.90	2
Other	0.60	0
2016 Election		
Party	Presidential Vote %	National Assembly Seats
FSLN	72.44	71
PLC	15.03	14
PLI	4.51	2
Other	8.02	5

¹⁴¹ Close, 10.

¹⁴² Puig and Wright, "The Adaptation of the FSLN," 92.

¹⁴³ Adapted from Election Guide, "Country Profile: Nicaragua."

F. 2006–2020

The FSLN’s persistence and subsequent resurgence in 2006 can be attributed to several factors. First, in January 2000, Daniel Ortega and President Arnoldo Alemán entered into an agreement known as the “Pact,” which, among other things, restricted political representation and reduced the electoral conditions necessary to win the presidency.¹⁴⁴ Essentially, the Pact

lowered from 45 percent to 40 percent the percentages of votes necessary to win without going to a second round, and if the differences in votes between the first and second candidate was more than 5 percent, it was necessary to win only 35 percent of the votes.¹⁴⁵

It also restricted legal standing to new parties unless they could present “a list of signatures equivalent to at least 3 percent of the last electoral roll.”¹⁴⁶ Proponents argued the Pact would create stability by eliminating microparties, while opponents argued it restricted competition.¹⁴⁷ In the end, what the Pact did was help give the FSLN its first presidential victory since its defeat in 1990 by allowing it to succeed with only 38.10 percent of the vote.¹⁴⁸

Secondly, the FSLN was able to rebound and win back some of its popularity that had been lost throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. During the 2006 presidential campaign, the FSLN rebranded its image in an effort to appeal to a wider range of constituents. As part of this rebranding, Daniel Ortega reached out to several organizations to mend fences with previous opponents. From 2004 to 2006, he publicly apologized to the Catholic Church for FSLN attacks in the 1980s, formed an electoral alliance, made amends with members of the former Contra army, and promised to work with rather than against the

¹⁴⁴ Hoyt, “Parties and Pacts in Contemporary Nicaragua,” 30–31.

¹⁴⁵ Puig and Wright, “The Adaptation of the FSLN,” 91.

¹⁴⁶ Hoyt, “Parties and Pacts in Contemporary Nicaragua,” 31.

¹⁴⁷ Hoyt, 32–34.

¹⁴⁸ Election Guide, “Country Profile: Nicaragua.”

business sector.¹⁴⁹ In addition to this rebranding, he was also able to capitalize on the resurgence of left winged politics that had swept across Latin America in the early to mid-2000s. Not only did these tactics and advantages help give the FSLN a slight advantage over the incumbents that were plagued by disunion in 2006, but it also paid dividends in the 2011 and 2016 elections.

Lastly, and most importantly, the other inchoate parties had fractured and divided both their organizations and their votes before the 2006 election. Although there was some hope and expectation that the PLC would become a consistent contender against the FSLN, the fact that the party had no ideology other than being anti-Sandinista and had no foundation in comparison to the FSLN's revolutionary legacy meant it was doomed to collapse. On the other hand, the established FSLN could rely on its institutionalization, steady organization, and consistent voters to succeed. Puig and Wright agreed with this assessment by stating that one of the contributing factors to the FSLN's success, "was the solidity of the FSLN's party machine, which, in the end, was the political group with the highest levels of cohesion, obedient to its leader and spread throughout the country."¹⁵⁰

This cohesion, consistency, and voter reliability had carried over from election to election since 1984. Although the no candidate from the FSLN had held the office of the presidency since 1990, it was always able to hold onto a strong and consistent contingent of voting shares when compared to the opposition in terms of parties and not coalitions. This consistency endured, through good times and bad times, since the FSLN first consolidated its power in 1979 and has even increased dramatically over the past two elections in 2011 and 2016 (see Figure 1).

¹⁴⁹ Héctor Cruz Feliciano, "The Perils of Reconciliation: Achievements and Challenges of Daniel Ortega and the Modern FSLN," *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 1 (January 2019): 250–251, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X18803876>.

¹⁵⁰ Puig and Wright, "The Adaptation of the FSLN," 92.

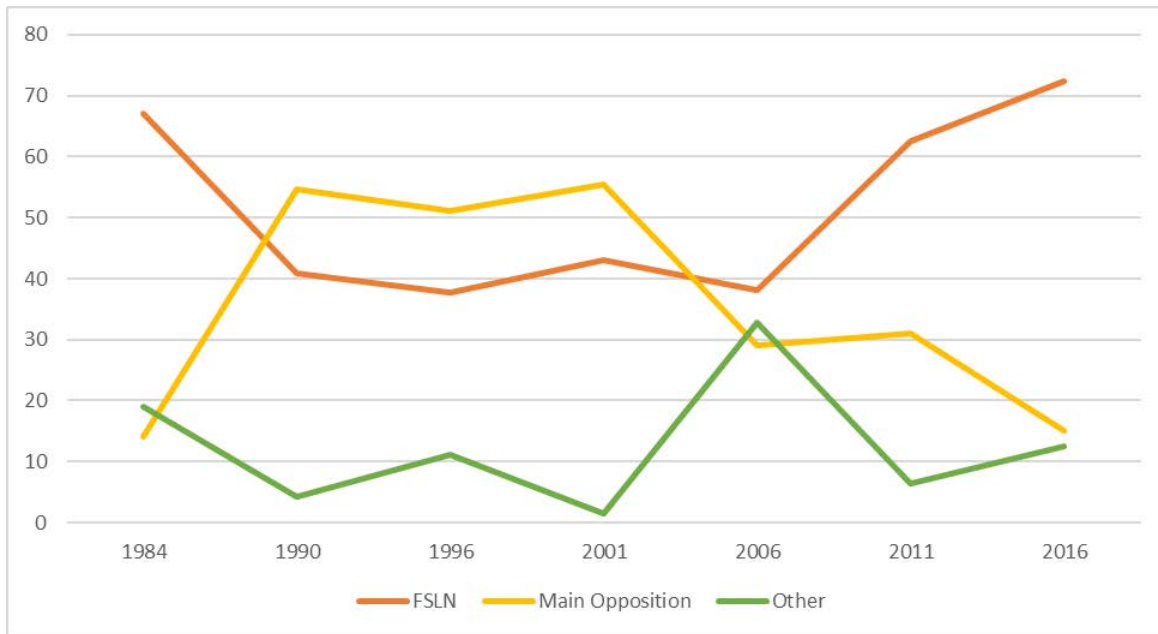


Figure 1. Nicaragua's Presidential Election Voting Shares, 1984–2016¹⁵¹

The data demonstrates that the FSLN has always been a formidable and consistent political contender as a result of its early consolidation of power since 1979 and was only checked in the 1990s and early 2000s by a string of coalitions and one flash party. As demonstrated earlier in this analysis, these two coalitions and the PLC were predominately only anti-Sandinista with slogans such as “*Qué se vayan!* (Get rid of 'em!)”¹⁵² and not ideologically or organizationally founded. As a result, both coalitions and the PLC have since divided or completely dissolved—a struggle that has plagued Nicaragua's opposition parties since their dilution after the takeover of the Somoza regime in 1937.

What is most striking about this data is not only the FSLN's increase in voting shares but also the near vanishment of all opposition in 2011 and 2016. In both elections, the FSLN was able to once again retain the presidency and a majority in the National Assembly but the opposition is now almost nonexistent. Consequently, the position of the FSLN as the hegemonic political party has deepened substantially. So much so that it now

¹⁵¹ Adapted from Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 25, 29, 176; Election Guide, “Country Profile: Nicaragua.”

¹⁵² Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 43.

appears more like the vanguard party of the 1980s, rather than the oppositional party of the 1990s. On the one hand, this has been good for Nicaragua because there has been a renewal in popular governmental programs under the FSLN, which, when coupled with Nicaragua's recent economic "growth of 4 to 5 percent annum," have helped thousands of Nicaraguans by increasing the nation's standards of living and reducing its rate of crime.¹⁵³ Additionally, Daniel Ortega has built a wide range of relationships with "business and religious communities," "Washington-based international financial institutions," and left leaning governments, such as Venezuela, which has recouped much of the FSLN financial strength and popular support creating a type of diplomatic and popular stability.¹⁵⁴ All good things for Nicaraguans economic stability and the FSLN's ability to reassert itself as the hegemonic party, but a difficult environment for an opposition party to build a new narrative to challenge the FSLN position.

Furthermore, with this much unfettered control, Ortega and the elite of the FSLN, have been able to consolidate not only an unfair amount of control over the political system but also over the state. Over the past decade, the FSLN has recovered a significant amount of control over television and radio station coverage, fortified new ties with Nicaraguan military and security forces, and has been able to "capture and suppress—one by one—many of the nation's political institutions, eroding institutional checks and balances."¹⁵⁵ Observing this infusion of party and state, Partlow said, "at a border crossing into Costa Rica, black-and-red Sandinista banners fly, but not the blue-and-white flag of Nicaragua."¹⁵⁶

Under these circumstances, it is even more difficult for opposition to rebuild and for democracy to survive. Some may even argue that democracy is at an end in Nicaragua

¹⁵³ Richard E. Feinberg, *Nicaragua: Revolution and Restoration* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2018), 6, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/nicaragua-revolution-and-restoration/>.

¹⁵⁴ Feinberg, 6, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Feinberg, 1, 5, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Joshua Partlow, "From Rebel to Strongman: How Daniel Ortega Became the Thing He Fought Against," *Washington Post*, August 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/from-rebel-to-strongman-how-daniel-ortega-became-the-thing-he-fought-against/2018/08/24/117d000a-97fe-11e8-818b-e9b7348cd87d_story.html.

until the FSLN once again allows for equal competition within its party system. The University of Gothenburg's varieties of democracy report of 2019 now classifies Nicaragua as a worst case of democratic breakdown and within the bottom 10 percent of all countries on its liberal democracy index.¹⁵⁷ The successful insurgency of the FSLN may have rid Nicaragua of proverbial Somoza dragon in 1979, but the disproportionate consolidation of power that it then amassed has over time turned it into the same dragon it set out to slay over 40 years ago.

G. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In 1979, the FSLN emerged as one of only two successful insurgencies in Latin America. With power concentrated in its hands, the FSLN rebuilt Nicaragua's political mechanisms based on the ideals of pluralism and vanguardism. This combination of ideals was meant to allow for the participation in government but only under the firm control of the FSLN to protect its revolutionary legacy. This system led to a dramatic imbalance of power that was only checked through a series of inconstant coalitions and political party victories. Once the FSLN's checked power had been regained in 2006, the party re-institutionalized and expanded itself as the hegemonic party into all facets of Nicaraguan society. This consolidation of power has made it virtually impossible for any already historically weak opposition to build a narrative against the FSLN and organize itself. The repression and subsequent death of hundreds of Nicaraguans in 2018 provide ample evidence to the risks and dangers of hegemonic revolutionary outcomes. If Nicaragua wishes to avoid repeating its past history, it must learn to accept political competition through democracy regardless of who became the revolutionary vanguard.

¹⁵⁷ V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Facing Global Challenges: V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019* (Gothenburg, Sweden: University of Gothenburg, 2019), 12, 23, https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/99/de/99dedd73-f8bc-484c-8b91-44ba601b6e6b/v-dem_democracy_report_2019.pdf.

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III. FAILED REVOLUTION TO SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL PARTY: THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR

Peter, Paul and Mary, a folk music singing group, wrote a song titled “El Salvador” in the early 1980s. The song begins by describing the subtle charms of El Salvador by saying, “There’s a sunny little country south of Mexico where the winds are gentle and the waters flow.”¹⁵⁸ However, this song was not meant to be an optimistic portrayal of the country but instead a revelation of unfortunate tragedy, a somber reminder about the horrors of war and the political violence that had recently infected the small agrarian country. A following verse revealed what was truly going on in El Salvador by saying,

There’s a thump a rumble and the buildings sway, a soldier fires the acid spray. The public address system starts to play South of the Border. You run for cover and hide your eyes. You hear the screams from paradise. They’ve fallen further than you realize in El Salvador.¹⁵⁹

Peter, Paul and Mary’s song was of course referring to the civil war that had engulfed El Salvador from 1980 to 1992—yet another example of political conflict and tragedy in Central America. A region that should have been synonymous with paradise but had instead become a symbol of oppression and war after decades of political tyranny and guerrilla warfare had proliferated across the region. In the specific case of El Salvador alone, more than 75,000 people were killed and over a million more people displaced as a result of its 12-year civil war.¹⁶⁰

Paradoxically, however, the same insurgent and counterinsurgent factions that had instigated and participated in this devastation 40 years ago are now competing uniformly and consistently against one another for the right to yield El Salvador’s political power through democracy. From an outsider’s perspective, this revelation of past violence would probably go either unnoticed or would seem almost implausible if given only a casual

¹⁵⁸ Peter, Paul and Mary, “El Salvador,” side 2, track 3 on *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, Giant Sound Studies and RCA Studies, 1986.

¹⁵⁹ Peter, Paul and Mary.

¹⁶⁰ Grace Livingstone, *America’s Backyard: The United States and Latin America from the Monroe Doctrine to the War on Terror* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 87.

glance into the current dynamics of El Salvador's democracy. The former insurgent group, the FMLN, and the former anti-insurgent political party, known as ARENA, now debate and compete openly as political parties without resorting to violence. In addition, both parties are firmly established within El Salvador's current party system where they willingly participate in "interparty competition," retain "stable roots in society," recognize all "elections as... legitimate institutions," and uphold "stable rules and structures."¹⁶¹ This impartiality in competition was perhaps best demonstrated in 2009 when the FMLN won the presidency for the first time with no resulting violence and with a promise from ARENA "to work with the new government."¹⁶² Although El Salvador is arguably still transitioning to become a fully consolidated democracy due to its continued inability to overcome some key issues, such as corruption, gang violence, and human rights abuses, it nonetheless has all the necessary ingredients for a stable institutionalized party system.¹⁶³

How did this happen? How did El Salvador's party system achieve this level of stability given its violent past? Why do both the FMLN and ARENA maintain a relatively even share of power within El Salvador's political atmosphere? Perhaps this has something to do with the unique outcome to the FMLN's insurgency in 1992, which was neither won nor lost by either the FMLN or ARENA because of a stalemate that had been reached between the two factions by the late 1980s. This stalemate forced both parties to the negotiating table, which ultimately obligated the FMLN and ARENA to share in El Salvador's political future. Although there was some concern that ARENA would become the hegemonic political party after its initial success in securing the presidency, the majority of the mayoral seats, and becoming the largest represented party in the legislature following the first elections after the end of the civil war, this has ultimately not come to pass.¹⁶⁴ In 2001, 2003, and 2009, the FMLN reversed ARENA's position and became the largest party in the Legislative Assembly. Additionally, the FMLN was also able to secure

¹⁶¹ Mainwaring and Scully, "Introduction," 1.

¹⁶² Blake Schmidt and Elisabeth Malkin, "Leftist Party Wins Salvadoran Vote," *New York Times*, March 16, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/17/world/americas/17salvador.html>.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019: Events of 2018*, 193–197.

¹⁶⁴ Holland, "Insurgent Successor Parties," 290–292.

the presidency in both 2009 and 2014.¹⁶⁵ A clear indication that neither party has been able to consolidate a strict hegemony over El Salvador's democracy.

The central hypothesis in this particular case study is that the current balance of power in El Salvador's party system is a product of the revolution's negotiated outcome. This outcome was different from other insurgent outcomes because there was no defeat, no overthrow, and no submission by either the insurgent factions or the government and its military forces. As a result, neither party had secured the power to dictate the future of El Salvador's political control. The only alternative was either prolonged conflict or compromise. By choosing compromise, both parties were able to create a new party system that paved the way for a more feasible democracy for El Salvador because it institutionalized two successful parties on each side of the political spectrum. In turn, this has allowed El Salvador to achieve both competition and stability within its current political environment.

Once again, it is important to recognize that this path from insurgency to political party is not possible without the influences of El Salvador's greater history. The outcome of the revolution in 1992 and the subsequent democratization of El Salvador came as a result of centuries of political conflict within the region; therefore, it is useful to review the history of political power and insurgency in El Salvador in order to grasp how and why the FMLN and ARENA emerged and how their emergence influences El Salvador's politics today.

A. BACKGROUND TO POWER AND INSURGENCY IN EL SALVADOR

Unlike many of its neighbors, El Salvador remained predominantly free of major U.S. military intervention until the 1980s when Washington intervened due to the outbreak of civil war and fears of a communist takeover; however, this lack of early intervention did not make El Salvador any less immune to insurgent insurrections seeking to overthrow the powers of government.¹⁶⁶ From the very beginning of El Salvador's history, power in the

¹⁶⁵ Holland, 287–89.

¹⁶⁶ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 66.

country has always been concentrated in the hands of a small minority, which has created a significant amount of social, political, and economic inequality. In turn, these conditions triggered several insurgencies throughout El Salvador's history; however, unlike in Nicaragua, this conflict was predominantly inflicted from powers within and not influenced by powers from without.

Prior to El Salvador becoming the nation it is known as today, its territory was known by the first native people, and later by the first Spanish colonizers, as *Cuzcatlán*.¹⁶⁷ When early European colonizers determined that there were “few natural resources to exploit” in this region of the New World, they quickly came to the conclusion that the key to wealth and power could only be obtained through control of the land and the growth of cash crops such as cacao, indigo, and, eventually, coffee.¹⁶⁸ As previously mentioned, this ensuing concentration of land into the hands of a minority created a reality where too few had too much, and too many had too little. By the time Central America became independent from Spain in 1821, one-third of El Salvador's land was already concentrated into the hands of only 400 plantations.¹⁶⁹ Further encroachments onto communal lands in the 1830s only exacerbated the problem by transforming the now-landless farmers from agricultural producers into cash-crop laborers.¹⁷⁰ This greatly stifled their economic autonomy and only further intensified their feelings of animosity toward the elitism of the now firmly established landowning oligarchy. In 1832, these conditions triggered one of El Salvador's first major insurgencies in which over 3,000 peasants rose up and fought against the elite's power and control over the land and the burdens they enforced.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, after a year of fighting, the insurgents were unable to change the balance of power and were soon defeated after their leader, Anastacio Aquino, was captured and later brutally executed to deter further rebellion.¹⁷² Sadly, Aquino's insurgency did little

¹⁶⁷ Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 25.

¹⁶⁸ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 26–30.

¹⁶⁹ Montgomery, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 18.

¹⁷¹ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 29.

¹⁷² Montgomery, 29.

to ebb the continued consolidation of land by the elites over the next century. As coffee became the new “key to... El Salvador’s economic strength and stability,” the wealthy eventually seized all collective property to maximize the cultivation and profits from the new cash crop.¹⁷³

For nearly a century following Aquino’s insurgency, the military was successful in suppressing any new major insurrections from occurring for the most part; however, by 1932, the continued blatant exploitation of the masses ultimately led to another significant, albeit short-lived, insurgency against the oligarchy. This insurgency was again quickly put down by the military; however, in this instance, over 30,000 peasants were consequently executed as retribution.¹⁷⁴ The orchestrator of the movement, Augustin Farabundo Martí, a Salvadoran native but also a former colonel in Augusto Sandino’s guerilla army in Nicaragua, was arrested and shot for inciting the insurrection.¹⁷⁵ His Marxist inspired uprising may not have succeeded, but his legacy would carry forward and would later be reborn in 1980 when his name was adopted to create a new insurgency with a similar Marxist ideology, the FMLN.

Ironically, as a direct result of Martí’s failed insurgency in 1932, a fundamental shift in the relationship of power between the various military organizations and the elites would prove to be the very driving factor for the creation of the FMLN. Previously, the military organizations had been bought and paid for by the landowners to protect their control over power; however, after 1932, the military had consolidated enough of its own strength to effectively become a part of the oligarchy as the political arm of power.¹⁷⁶ However, the military was still not strong enough economically to “provide a counterweight to the dominance of the landowning class,” nor could the landowners survive without the military’s protection.¹⁷⁷ This created a delicate balancing act between the two entities to ensure that they both maintained their economic and political powers

¹⁷³ Montgomery, 30.

¹⁷⁴ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 68.

¹⁷⁵ Landau, 67–68.

¹⁷⁶ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 24.

while still exploiting the masses. From 1931 to 1980, this dysfunctional relationship led to an irrational cyclical pattern of 1) power consolidation by the military, 2) the repression of dissenters, 3) regime change enforced by the elites for failure “to maintain... the appropriate balance between repression and concession,” and 4) the consolidation of power by the military once again.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, by the end of the 1970s, chaos had ensued and no amount of reforms or pretenses of civilian oversight were enough to keep the oligarchic military regime from continually reconsolidating control of El Salvador’s power through fear and oppression.

By the late 1970s, this dysfunctional control of power could no longer be tolerated. Thus, the long silent Catholic clergy activated to finally speak out against the repression and the various insurgency organizations to rise up as the FMLN to dislodge the military and oligarchy’s political power. Byrne argued that these two movements were the catalysts to the “transformation of peasant consciousness,”¹⁷⁹ a realization that some form of forceful action or insurgency, “the inevitable result of the clash between the oppressor and oppressed when the latter reach the limits of their endurance,” was necessary to change the status quo.¹⁸⁰

B. FMLN INSURGENCY

By 1977, instability in El Salvador had reached its breaking point. To regain the upper hand, the military unleashed a massive campaign of repression against anyone deemed “subversive” in a desperate attempt to regain control of the rapidly deteriorating political situation. Hundreds of people suspected of activism were disappeared or executed by far-right military death squads and security forces. Even Catholic priests who spoke out against the repression were not immune to the regime’s paranoia driven backlash. From 1977 to 1980, 11 priests, including the archbishop of San Salvador, were assassinated by

¹⁷⁸ Byrne, 23–24.

¹⁷⁹ Byrne, 27.

¹⁸⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B Griffith (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1989), 41, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/FMFRP%2012-18%20%20Mao%20Tse-tung%20on%20Guerrilla%20Warfare.pdf>.

pro-government militants.¹⁸¹ In response, four insurgent groups, the Popular Liberation Forces, the National Resistance, the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC), and the People's Revolutionary Army came together and unified as the FMLN on October 10, 1980 in an effort to end the repression and seize power through the overthrow of the oligarchy.¹⁸² This move of solidarity gave a very powerful and clear message that the guerrillas were ready to escalate the conflict to take control of the country, and with the recent success of the FSLN's insurgency in Nicaragua, the possibility of a successful FMLN had to be taken seriously.

Consequently, the United States, under the new Regan administration, fearful of another Marxist takeover in Central America, quickly intervened and "devoted unequivocal support to the government" despite their human rights violations.¹⁸³ By the end of the war, this would amount to over \$6 billion in economic and military assistance.¹⁸⁴ In addition, a group of far-right organizations created a new political party, ARENA, to oppose the FMLN's Marxist uprising. ARENA would soon become infamous for its use of death squads and paramilitary groups to eliminate alleged insurgents and its political opponents, yet surprisingly, these atrocities did little to keep them from later "developing into a successful electoral party."¹⁸⁵

Similar to the FSLN, the FMLN had established a strong political foundation to its organization from its inception. In addition, it had "developed considerable support among the peasants" and within the urban populations as well.¹⁸⁶ Bracamonte and Spencer even proclaimed it as "the best militarily developed insurgent movement in the history of the American continent"; however, even though it had achieved many of the components necessary for a successful insurgency, the FMLN soon found out that it would not be able

¹⁸¹ Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 31.

¹⁸² Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 93.

¹⁸³ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 169.

¹⁸⁴ Seth G. Jones et al., *Securing Tyrants or Fostering Reform? U.S. Internal Security Assistance to Repressive and Transitioning Regimes*, MG-055-OSI (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 23.

¹⁸⁵ Ralph Sprenkels, *After Insurgency: Revolution and Electoral Politics in El Salvador* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 13.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 169.

to replicate the same rapid success as the FSLN.¹⁸⁷ Although the FMLN's first offensives from 1980 to 1984 were widely successful in repelling the military and capturing significant amounts of territory, the FMLN lacked the manpower to continually hold the land it had captured.¹⁸⁸ In addition, the monetary and military support pouring in from the United States made it extremely difficult to fight the military conventionally. Nevertheless, the FMLN remained resilient and a significant threat. Although it would ultimately fail in overthrowing the government, a series of relatively successful counteroffensives from 1987 to 1989 were enough to convince many of the "wealthy Salvadorans and some of the U.S. national security elite that a compromise had to be reached."¹⁸⁹

In the case of the Salvadoran military, it too was militarily sound and well supported, but it was also unsuccessful in delivering a decisive blow against its opponent. Ultimately, it failed to develop a unified political, military, and economic strategy to defeat the FMLN.¹⁹⁰ Byrne referred to its efforts as "a series of piecemeal approaches."¹⁹¹ As a result, the Salvadoran military and the increasingly influential ARENA were never able to overcome the FMLN ideologically nor militarily. In addition, the atrocities carried out by the military and ARENA negated their ability to win the hearts and minds of the people. For example, by 1984, over 50,000 civilians had been murdered predominantly at the hands of the death squads.¹⁹² The murders of Archbishop Oscar Romero and three American nuns and a lay missionary in 1980, the murder of four Dutch journalist in 1982, and the murder of six Jesuits priests and their two servants in 1989 were particularly devastating to the credibility of the two organizations.¹⁹³ Accordingly, by 1990 the chances of a successful insurgency or counterinsurgency had all but disappeared. In other words, the war had been

¹⁸⁷ José Angel Moroni Bracamonte and David E. Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas: Last Battle of the Cold War, Blueprint for Future Conflicts* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 37.

¹⁸⁸ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 98.

¹⁸⁹ Landau, 140.

¹⁹⁰ Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 88.

¹⁹¹ Byrne, 88.

¹⁹² Byrne, 115.

¹⁹³ United Nations, *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador*, Document 67 (New York: United Nations, 1993).

stalemated, or as Landau put it, “the guerrillas... were better fighters, smarter tacticians and more committed than their enemy, but the U.S. supply line, the infinite source of money and weapons had changed the war.... a dynamic equilibrium was established.”¹⁹⁴

This equilibrium combined with the fatigue of 12 years of civil war, international pressure, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, including the voting out of FMLNs closest ally, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, left no question in anyone’s mind that the time for revolutionary fervor had passed. In response, the now elected ARENA government and the FMLN reached a negotiated outcome to the revolution and signed the Chapultepec peace agreement on January 16, 1992.¹⁹⁵ One of the hallmark resolutions to the accords was the commitment to allow the FMLN “full political participation.”¹⁹⁶ The agreement also restructured the military, disbanded the security forces, established a national police force, strengthened the judicial and electoral systems, and disarmed the FMLN.”¹⁹⁷ The negotiations were considered ground breaking and established the groundwork for a democratic El Salvador with all the mechanisms in place for a competitive party system to take hold. Byrne explained,

The outcome, reflecting the inability of either side to win a political or military victory ... was an agreement that, if implemented effectively, would lead to a genuine democratization of the society, creating the conditions for the Salvadoran people to choose freely among competing visions of the future political and socioeconomic order.¹⁹⁸

C. NEGOTIATED POWER AND PARTY SYSTEM STABILITY

If the objective of an insurgency is to “seize, nullify, or challenge political control,” then one could argue that the outcome of El Salvador’s insurgency was successful, for all

¹⁹⁴ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 115.

¹⁹⁵ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 225.

¹⁹⁶ “Chapultepec Peace Agreement,” United Nations General Assembly, January 30, 1992, 39, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SV_920116_ChapultepecAgreement.pdf.

¹⁹⁷ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.

¹⁹⁸ Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 193.

intents and purposes.¹⁹⁹ The negotiated outcome of the insurgency gave the FMLN the right to incorporate into El Salvador's politics where it could theoretically obtain political power through democracy. However, because the political structures and institutions of the oligarchy were not wholly uprooted and supplanted as a consequence of the insurgency, as in the case of Nicaragua, the FMLN did not achieve revolution. In other words, one could argue that El Salvador is a case of successful insurgency but a failed revolution. As a result of this outcome, a new system had to be created through compromise and negotiation, a system that would allow for competition from both sides of the political spectrum. To emphasize just how unique and significant this outcome was Montgomery described,

The Chapultepec accords, so name for the castle where they were signed, sought to deal with the fundamental causes of the war by ending the armed conflict as quickly as possible; by promoting democratization; by guaranteeing absolute respect for human rights; and by reunifying Salvadoran Society. These objectives are unprecedented; no obvious civil war has ended with an agreement not simply to stop shooting but to restructure society.²⁰⁰

The primary United Nation mediator of the peace accords, Alvaro de Soto, said, "This is the closest that any process has ever come to a negotiated revolution."²⁰¹ Simply put, both the FMLN and ARENA could now compete without the use of violence or political exclusion. In *After Insurgency*, Sprenkels noted, "Some comandantes labeled the transition as the 'democratic revolution' they had fought for all along, while others framed it as the highest attainable result at the time given the national and international political circumstances."²⁰²

Although Montgomery, de Soto, and Sprenkels were correct in stating that the negotiated outcome was unprecedented, and it is also true that it fundamentally changed how future political power was to be distributed in El Salvador. Since the FMLN

¹⁹⁹ Department of the Army, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006), 1-2, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=468442>.

²⁰⁰ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 226.

²⁰¹ Tim Golden, "The Salvadorans Make Peace in a 'Negotiated Revolution,'" *New York Times*, January 5, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/05/weekinreview/the-world-the-salvadorans-make-peace-in-a-negotiated-revolution.html>.

²⁰² Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 2.

had not won the revolution, its ability to take or maintain any form of political power was going to be much different than the Sandinistas' experience in Nicaragua. To survive, the FMLN was going to have to continually work to achieve power while in constant competition. Ultimately, this competition would help bring stability to El Salvador's troubled party system.

Prior to the 1992 peace accords, El Salvador's party system was in disarray. El Salvador was very familiar with elections, but it did not know democracy. After the military and the economic elites had separated into their different political and economic arms of the oligarchy, after the failed insurgency of Farabundo Martí in the 1930s, elections were held over the years to give the illusion of democracy; however, the reality of the situation was much different. With regard to the party system at this time, Zeeuw asserted in a 2010 article, "Elections for the national assembly and presidency were held only occasionally and manipulated in such a way that opposition parties were unable to challenge the power of the official parties."²⁰³ As a result, early political parties in El Salvador were significantly hindered from institutionalizing into anything that resembled a stable or competitive party system. Furthermore, the existing parties, such as the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Revolution and the National Conciliation Party (PCN), did not serve any other political purpose than to concentrate more land and resources into the hands of the elites.²⁰⁴ Over time, a few political openings would eventually allow for social democrats, Christian democrats, and even Marxists, to form a small conciliary of political parties; however, they too would be denied the ability to compete fairly in El Salvador's elections until the 1970s.²⁰⁵

The onset of the civil war in the 1980s, however, began to change the party system dynamics in El Salvador now that the United States was involved. From the very beginning of U.S. involvement, the Reagan administration had made it clear that it would push for

²⁰³ Jeroen de Zeeuw, "'Sons of War': Parties and Party Systems in Post-war El Salvador and Cambodia," *Democratization* 17, no. 6 (December 2010): 1179, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2010.520549>.

²⁰⁴ de Zeeuw, "'Sons of War,'" 1179.

²⁰⁵ Landau, *Guerrilla Wars of Central America*, 71.

regular elections after 1982.²⁰⁶ However, the elections could not be considered truly democratic, since they were held under the conditions of war and because they were not held on the initiative of Salvadorans.²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, they gave a window of opportunity for several parties to form or further develop thus strengthening the party system through competition; however, this strengthening would have its limits. For instance, only three of the 13 parties, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the PCN, and ARENA, that competed during the five elections from 1982 to 1989, actually garnered any amount of credible or sustained electoral support. In addition, Both the PDC and the PCN had already been founded in the 1960s long before the 1982 election (see Table 6).

Table 6. Percentage of Electoral Votes for Major Parties in El Salvador, 1982–1989²⁰⁸

Party	1982	1984	1985	1988	1989
PDC	40.1	43.41	52.35	35.1	36.03
ARENA	29.53	29.76	29.7	48.1	53.82
PCN	19.17	19.31	8.36	8.5	4.07
Others	7.28	7.38	9.64	8.33	6.08

All the remaining parties had either flopped or were only able to maintain a small minority of the electorate throughout this time period. Additionally, all three of these parties were considered to be rightwing on the political spectrum, which indicated that little to no competition from the left truly existed during these elections.²⁰⁹ Intimidation and political isolation of the left, along with the refusal to allow the FMLN to compete in the elections, had created an atmosphere wherein party building had become extremely biased

²⁰⁶ Landau, 106–107.

²⁰⁷ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 156.

²⁰⁸ Adapted from Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 161.

²⁰⁹ Montgomery, 157.

in favor of the right.²¹⁰ Consequently, El Salvador's party system did expand in the 1980s but remained highly lopsided until the FMLN entered the party system in 1992.

This lopsidedness in the party system would be reduced, however, to just one dominant party, ARENA, by 1988. The PCN suffered a devastating split in the party in 1982, which left it unable to amass any more than 9.64 percent of the electorate from 1985 to 1989.²¹¹ The once prominent PDC also suffered a devastating blow to its credibility in the mid-1980s after it became mired in a series of corruption charges—a weakness fully exploited by ARENA in its election campaigns after the 1985 election. In 1985, under President Jose Napoleon Duarte, the PDC had surprisingly swept the elections winning 33 seats in the 84-seat legislature and 153 of the 262 municipalities; however, after the revelation of widespread corruption in the party became known, the PDC would secure only 22 seats in the legislature and only 79 municipalities just three years later in 1988.²¹² This slow decline was highlighted even further after the 1994 election when the PDC won only 18 legislative seats and only 29 municipalities.²¹³ Additionally, it too suffered a devastating split in the party just prior to the 1989 presidential election as a result of infighting over who would lead the party after President Duarte.²¹⁴ Consequently, both the PDC and the PCN seriously declined in the 1980s, giving ARENA both the legislative majority in 1988 and the presidential win to ARENA's candidate, Alfredo Cristiani, in 1989.²¹⁵ This set the stage for a future two party system.

The collapse of the PDC and PCN on the right certainly provided an opening for ARENA to emerge during the 1988 and 1989 elections, but it does not necessarily explain how ARENA was able to obtain and build its power and dominance, given the fact that most new parties tend not to succeed. The fact of the matter was that ARENA's

²¹⁰ Montgomery, 158.

²¹¹ Montgomery, 161, 163.

²¹² Montgomery, 196.

²¹³ "Memoria Anual de Labores Correspondiente a 1994 y Memoria de Labores de las Elecciones de 1994 [Annual Report of Work Corresponding to 1994 and the 1994 Elections]," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, 1994, <https://www.tse.gob.sv/documentos/memoria-de-elecciones/memoria-elecciones-1994.pdf>.

²¹⁴ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 208–209.

²¹⁵ Montgomery, 215.

organizational structure was in place long before its transition to political party, thus giving it the necessary foundation to party build and consolidate power. This foundation began in the 1960s when the Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN) and the Salvadoran National Security Agency (ANSESAL) were created by the then official party of the military, the PCN, to create a paramilitary (ORDEN) and intelligence institution (ANSESAL) “to spy, carry out repression, and turn out the vote for the official party on election day.”²¹⁶ In other words, ANSESAL was the eyes and ears and ORDEN the hands and feet of the PCN to carryout El Salvador’s dirty war. Following the coup of 1979, however, the recently self-appointed governing junta ordered both to disband.²¹⁷ In spite of this mandate, the founder of the ARENA, who also happened to be the former deputy director of ANSESAL, Major Robert D’Aubuisson, took many of the records and contacts he had made between the two organizations to create a new paramilitary organization that would eventually make the transition to political party as a response to the “imminent transition to democracy” ordered by the United States in the early 1980s.²¹⁸

In addition, ARENA was a product of war. This gave it the branding, cohesion, and financial backing to make it not only a successful anti-insurgent paramilitary organization but also a successful political party. Coupled with its “effective U.S.-style” campaigns, this allowed it to win over a considerable amount of powerful supporters and consolidate a great deal of power via the national elections.²¹⁹ Zeeuw noted, “ARENA’s strength was a function of its organizational set-up as an alliance of influential societal sectors and its popular recognition as a symbol of anti-communist nationalism.”²²⁰ The fact that it was able to consolidate this power before the end of the civil war was also a substantial advantage because it gave ARENA an early hegemony as the source of government. Zeeuw remarked, “This early capture of power enabled ARENA... not only extend [its] political

²¹⁶ Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties,” 265.

²¹⁷ Loxton, 265.

²¹⁸ Loxton, 265–267.

²¹⁹ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 214.

²²⁰ de Zeeuw, ‘Sons of War,’ 267.

control over state policies but also over the state's administrative and security apparatus.... this led to deep penetration of the party into the state."²²¹

By 1989, for all intents and purposes, ARENA had consolidated the majority of El Salvador's political power; however, without the end of the FMLN insurgency, it still remained vulnerable. Additionally, without the inclusion of all of El Salvador's society, elections were not going to create a truly functioning democratic society, nor would they allow ARENA to become a truly legitimate holder of El Salvador's political power. Therefore, ARENA still did not have the power to dictate the future of El Salvador. On the other hand, the FMLN may not have had the political power at this time, but it certainly had the military strength to be able to continue threatening ARENA's position of power. Recognizing both the threat and the stalemate, President Alfredo Cristiani "called for immediate peace talks with the FMLN" only two days after the 1989 election.²²² The resulting negotiated outcome of the insurgency, coupled with ARENA's recently established dominance as a party of the political right, would now allow the FMLN to balance the party system as a party of the political left and thus allow El Salvador to fully integrate all of its society and democratize. The rest, as they say, is history.

After the peace accords and prior to the 1994 election, however, the FMLN faced an uphill battle against ARENA. Yes, it had secured its right to compete as a political party, and yes, the stage had been set for a predominant two-party showdown, but the FMLN still needed to coalesce as a party and gain enough support if it wanted to garner any power through the elections. Being a product of war, the FMLN also benefited from its organizational structures and branding as the opposition party, but unfortunately, it had suffered cohesively once it began to make the transition from insurgency to political party. As Holland explicated, "Despite [its] organizational advantage, FMLN leaders fought over party platform, candidates, and alliances. Ultimately party leaders privileged ideological discipline and legislative opposition over electoral success."²²³ These ongoing internal

²²¹ de Zeeuw, 1184.

²²² Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 215.

²²³ Holland, "Insurgent Successor Parties," 283.

problems made many speculate by 1993 whether or not the FMLN would survive the elections.²²⁴ However, despite this initial party factionalism, the FMLN was able to survive, and even thrive, due in large part to “the intense loyalties of the FMLN’s supporters.”²²⁵ Its base remained largely intact and connected to the FMLN’s figurative position as the opposition party; therefore, splinter parties did little long-term harm to the FMLN’s ability to compete successfully in future elections.

D. 1994–1999

Because the Salvadoran electorate system only elects the 262 municipalities and the 84 Legislative Assembly deputies once every three years and the president once every five years, the country only elects all three at the same time every 15 years, and 1994 was such a year. Coupled with the fact that it would be the first completely free and open election in El Salvador’s history, this characterized the 1994 election as the “election of the century” by both national participants and international observers.²²⁶ However, the question that still remained on everyone’s mind was whether the negotiated outcome of the insurgency had been enough to equalize the distribution of political power and subsequently change the balance of the party system.

The 1994 elections across the three main categories of the municipalities, the legislature, and the presidency would appear to disprove this theory (see Table 7). Although the FMLN was able to secure 21 seats in the Legislative Assembly, it still lagged significantly behind ARENA in all three election categories. In addition, the FMLN, Democratic Convergence (CD), and Revolutionary National Movement (MNR) had competed as a coalition for the presidency.²²⁷ Their comparatively weak numbers indicate that even their combined effort was not enough to win against ARENA. The results would suggest that there was a type of pluralist hegemonic party system for the 1994 elections where everyone competed, but only one party won.

²²⁴ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 253.

²²⁵ Holland, “Insurgent Successor Parties,” 286.

²²⁶ Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 248.

²²⁷ Tribunal Supremo Electoral, “Annual Report of 1994,” 35.

Table 7. El Salvador's Election Results by Vote Percentage, 1994²²⁸

Party	Presidential 1st Round %*	Presidential 2nd Round %*	Legislative Assembly % (Seats)	Municipalities % (Seats)
ARENA	49.11	68.35	42.7 (39)	41.9 (207)
FMLN	24.99	31.65	28.1 (21)	26.4 (13)
CD	-	-	5.3 (1)	3.9 (2)
MNR	-	-	0.5	0.4
MAC	0.82	-	0.5	0.4 (1)
MU	2.41	-	2.7 (1)	2.1
MSN	1.05	-	0.7	0.7
PCN	5.34	-	3.7 (4)	6.8 (10)
PDC	16.27	-	10.8 (18)	12.5 (29)

* The FMLN, CD, and MNR competed as a coalition in the presidential election.

However, if one looks deeper than the simple election percentages, there are several factors that would challenge the conclusion that ARENA was wholly hegemonic. First, despite the FMLN's inability to secure the presidency and a significant amount of the municipalities and legislative seats, it still had the second highest voter turnout in all three categories over all other parties, and its presidential coalition helped force ARENA into a second round of voting for the presidency.²²⁹ This was a clear indication that the FMLN's participation in the elections was more than just temporary. Second, the FMLN had to contend with a party fully in control of all the state's administrative apparatuses, including the office of the presidency and all the advantages and resources it provided. This clearly disadvantaged the FMLN, but despite this, the FMLN was still able to put forth a formidable campaign. Third, "a surge in violence against FMLN leaders and cadres" including the assassination of FMLN member and PRTC leader, Francisco Velis, in October 1993 "discouraged potential FMLN collaborators from participating in the

²²⁸ Adapted from Tribunal Supremo Electoral, 37–60.

²²⁹ Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Challenges to Political Democracy in El Salvador," in *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, ed. Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 191.

elections.”²³⁰ The left had been suspicious of elections ever since the massacres of the political left in the 1970s and 1980s, and the outbreak of violence was enough to keep many voters away. Lastly, this was only the first election following the end of the civil war. Since ARENA had already clearly established itself within the government and therefore competed from a superior position, it was only logical that the FMLN would not garner the same amount of electoral support; however, the gate had been opened for the FMLN through the peace accords and future elections would prove that the FMLN could make considerable gains in order to increase its parity with ARENA.

The Legislative Assembly and municipalities election of 1997 illustrate this point (see Table 8). In the municipalities race, the FMLN went from 13 to 54 seats, reducing ARENA’s control from 207 to 160. In the Legislative Assembly election, the FMLN and ARENA reached almost parity with ARENA’s 28 seats to the FMLN’s 27. This meant that without collaboration or coalition with the other parties, neither party would be able to undertake legislation solely on its own because it did not hold the majority. Perhaps most surprisingly was the FMLN’s capture of the municipalities of the country’s two major cities of San Salvador and Santa Ana.²³¹ This greatly increased the percentage of the population governed by the FMLN even though it held fewer municipalities. Although ARENA clearly still held a significant amount of control over the government in 1997, the fact that the FMLN was able to make these considerable gains only further demonstrated its ability to compete successfully, thus, creating a more stable party system. Sprenkels stated, “The FMLN leadership attributed the electoral success particularly to the sustained efforts... to strengthen the organizational base of the unified party.”²³² Following the 1994 elections the FMLN sought to expand its base by seeking out former militants and promoting party activity within new sectors of society. The result was the registration of “twenty-eight thousand affiliated members.”²³³ This is something that could have never been done before

²³⁰ Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 106.

²³¹ Tribunal Supremo Electoral, *Memoria Especial: Tribunal Supremo Electoral* [Special Report: Supreme Electoral Court] (San Salvador: El Gobierno de El Salvador, 1997), 49, <https://www.tse.gob.sv/documentos/memoria-de-elecciones/memoria-elecciones-1997.pdf>.

²³² Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 112.

²³³ Sprenkels, 112.

1992 for fear of retaliation, and it was undoubtedly a significant factor in the FMLN's increased successes in 1997.

Table 8. El Salvador's Legislative Assembly and Municipalities Election Results, 1997²³⁴

Party	Legislative Assembly Seats		Municipality Seats	
ARENA	28	*(-11)	160	*(-47)
FMLN	27	*(+6)	54	*(+41)
Other	29		48	

* Number of seats added or lost from previous election.

The 1999 presidential election would be a setback for the FMLN. Although many “considered that the FMLN had a real chance of winning the 1999 presidential elections,” the removal of Sánchez Cerén as the secretary general of the party in late 1997 led to an internal dispute that distracted the party from putting forth a sustained campaign.²³⁵ As a result, the FMLN lost in the first round 29.05 percent to 51.96 percent with the remaining percentage split between five other small parties.²³⁶ This fissure and subsequent electoral debacle, however, forced the FMLN to reevaluate its leadership. As a result, it was actually stronger for the 2000 elections.²³⁷

E. 2000–2009

The 2000 and 2003 legislative and municipal elections would see much more of the same progress from the FMLN as it had demonstrated in 1997. In fact, the FMLN would hit its first major electoral milestone by surpassing ARENA as the largest party in the

²³⁴ Adapted from Wood, “Challenges to Political Democracy in El Salvador,” 192.

²³⁵ Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 112–113.

²³⁶ Tribunal Supremo Electoral, *Memoria Especial: Eleccion de Preidente y Vicepresidente de la Republica 7 de Marzo de 1999* [Special Report: Election of the President and Vice President of the Republic, March 7, 1999] (San Salvador: El Gobierno de El Salvador, 1999), 77, <https://www.tse.gob.sv/documentos/memoria-de-elecciones/memoria-elecciones-1999.pdf>.

²³⁷ Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 113.

Legislative Assembly in 2000 (see Table 9). This meant that the FMLN would have to depend less on smaller parties, and ARENA would have to depend more on the smaller parties to ensure a legislative majority.²³⁸ Furthermore, the FMLN extended the number of municipalities it controlled in 2000 to 69 with a slight dip to 62 municipalities in 2003 after the FMLN lost a few municipalities to a number of the smaller parties. One could argue that the FMLN was still not in parity with ARENA in the municipality category since ARENA still controlled 111 municipalities over the FMLN's 62 by 2003; however, the FMLN once again took control of the major cities, a feat that must be taken into consideration. As a result, the FMLN had overtaken "ARENA in percentage of population governed at the municipal level."²³⁹ This metric is easily overlooked but is arguably just as or even more significant than the actual number of municipalities held. Although ARENA still held the presidency by 2003, the fact that the FMLN could compete and win parity with the ARENA on the municipal and legislative level was creating a more stable party system. This result was a byproduct of the FMLN's negotiated revolution.

Table 9. El Salvador's Legislative Assembly and Municipalities
Election Results, 2000, 2003²⁴⁰

Party	Legislative Assembly-2000	Municipal-2000	Legislative Assembly-2003	Municipal-2003
ARENA	29	127	27	111
FMLN	31	69	31	62
Other	29	48	26	89

In 2004, however, the presidency would once again elude the FMLN even after its significant gains in the 2000 and 2003 elections (see Table 10). In 2004, competition shrank from seven parties in 1999 to only four parties: ARENA, the FMLN, the PCN, and a PDC coalition. It would appear in this atmosphere that both ARENA and the FMLN would see

²³⁸ Sprenkels, 113.

²³⁹ Sprenkels, 113.

²⁴⁰ Adapted from Holland, "Insurgent Successor Parties," 292.

significant increases in their electorate because fewer parties would be bleeding off votes from the dominant parties; however, this was not the case for the FMLN. Internal strife between the more moderate FMLN candidate, Oscar Ortiz, and the more orthodox FMLN candidate, Schafik Handal, once again torpedoed the FMLN bid for the presidency.²⁴¹ Perhaps the biggest lesson from this election was that no matter what gains the FMLN made, ARENA still had the support and electoral base to keep power if the FMLN did not compete smartly.

Table 10. El Salvador's Presidential Election 2004²⁴²

Party	Presidential Vote %
ARENA	57.73
FMLN	35.63
PCN	2.73
*CDU-PDC	3.91

* United Democratic Center (CDU)

The 2006 and 2009 legislative and municipal election arguably demonstrate that a certain level of overarching parity and stability in El Salvador's party system had finally been achieved. First, the legislative numbers remained relatively the same over the six-year time period. Second, both ARENA's municipal and legislative seats went up in 2006 in comparison to the FMLN's seats going down. When the FMLN's seats rebounded in 2009, ARENA's correspondingly went down (see Table 11). This indicated that a steady rhythm of pendulum swings back and forth from right to left on the political spectrum had begun to manifest. In addition, the difference in votes for the 2009 presidential election between the FMLN and ARENA were the closest in El Salvador's history with only a difference of 4.6 percent of the votes, whereas the previous three presidential elections had a combined

²⁴¹ Sprenkels, *After Insurgency*, 253.

²⁴² Adapted from Tribunal Supremo Electoral, *Memoria Especial: Eleccion Presidencial 2004* [Special Report: 2004 Presidential Election] (San Salvador: El Gobierno de El Salvador, 2004), 110, <https://www.tse.gob.sv/documentos/memoria-de-elecciones/memoria-elecciones-2004.pdf>.

average of 27.2 percent of difference between the two parties. It was also the first presidential election win for the FMLN.²⁴³ This was another clear indication that a new level of stability had been reached within El Salvador's party system by the end of the 2010s. Neither party had secured absolute control over the political power of El Salvador; therefore, both parties, albeit still greatly polarized and at time aggressive toward one another, had to work together to direct the future of El Salvador.

Table 11. El Salvador's Presidential, Legislative, and Municipality Electoral Results, 2006–2019²⁴⁴

Year	Municipal Seats		Legislative Seats		Presidential Vote %	
	ARENA	FMLN	ARENA	FMLN	ARENA	FMLN
2006	147	54	34	32	-	-
2009	122	75	32	35	46.7	51.3
2012	116	85	33	31	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-	*49.8	50.1
2015	119	82	32	31	-	-
2018	137	61	35	18	-	-
2019	-	-	-	-	31.72	14.41

* Percentages shown are from the second round of voting.

F. 2010–2020

In El Salvador, the rhythm of mild political pendulum swings and the constant near parity in both the legislature and the presidential vote percentages continued from 2009 until 2015. In 2014, the FMLN was once again able to secure the presidency and demonstrate that it could successfully continue to compete at the presidential level for more than one term, which gave the impression that stability was enduring at last. The election

²⁴³ Holland, "Insurgent Successor Parties," 292.

²⁴⁴ Adapted from "Memorias de Elecciones [Memories of Elections]," Unidad de Comunicaciones del Tribunal Supremo Electoral de El Salvador, accessed February 12, 2020, <http://www.tse.gob.sv/TSE/Documentos/Memorias-de-Elecciones>.

results for 2018 and 2019, however, told a different story. In just three years, the FMLN lost 21 municipalities and 13 of its seats in the Legislative Assembly. In contrast, ARENA gained 18 municipalities and gained its highest level of legislative seats since 1994. In addition, neither party won the 2019 election. Instead an outside party, Great National Alliance (GANA) and its 37-year-old candidate, Nayib Bukele, won in the first round of voting with 54 percent of the vote.²⁴⁵ The culprit of this dramatic change was corruption charges against two former presidents, Antonia Saca of ARENA, who served as president from 2004 to 2009, and Mauricio Funes of the FMLN, who served as president from 2009 to 2014.²⁴⁶ Saca was convicted of money laundering and is currently in prison, and Funes was accused of embezzlement and money laundering and is currently seeking asylum in Nicaragua.²⁴⁷

The concern is that this recent decline in ARENA and the FMLN's appeal will change the dynamic of El Salvador's political system. Many have argued that GANA has broken El Salvador's two-party structure, which may or may not threaten El Salvador's current party system stability.²⁴⁸ A look at the presidential vote shares over the past 25 years highlights this sudden and very drastic change in El Salvador's confidence with ARENA and the FMLN parties as of 2019 (see Figure 2).²⁴⁹ However, while it is true that GANA has changed the dynamic of El Salvador's current balance of power, the fractures in society channeled through ARENA and the FMLN are still very prevalent today. In a system where parties are particularly weak, this type of election might have more profound implications on the party system. In this case, however, the party system is not weak, and the two parties will certainly resurge. Additionally, it is important to remember that the

²⁴⁵ Nelson Renteria and Noe Torres, "Outsider Wins El Salvador Presidency, Breaking Two-Party System," Reuters, February 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-elsalvador-election-idUSKCN1PS03W>.

²⁴⁶ Nelson Renteria, "El Salvador Launches Anti-corruption Commission, Inspired by Guatemala," Reuters, September 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-el-salvador-corruption-idUSKCN1VR2QP>.

²⁴⁷ Renteria, "El Salvador Launches."

²⁴⁸ Sasha Ingber, "El Salvador Elects New President, Breaking Decades-Long Control by 2 Parties," NPR, February 4, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/04/691254733/el-salvador-elects-new-president-breaking-decades-long-control-by-two-parties>.

²⁴⁹ "Country Profile: El Salvador," Election Guide, accessed February 12, 2020, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/66/>.

FMLN and ARENA are “sons of war” and their wartime origins have left deep imprints onto the organizational structures and psychologies of these two parties.²⁵⁰ The likelihood that these two parties are finished is highly unlikely considering what their long and lasting heritage means to many former combatants on both sides of the political aisle. In other words, the recent triumph of GANA is compelling and a startling dynamic to El Salvador’s politics; however, the negotiated outcome of the insurgency that allowed for democracy and political inclusion to take hold in El Salvador was bought with the blood of 75,000 Salvadorans. Therefore, the probability that the parties that were instrumental in the creation of that party system stability would no longer be willing to compete in El Salvador’s political future is improbable.

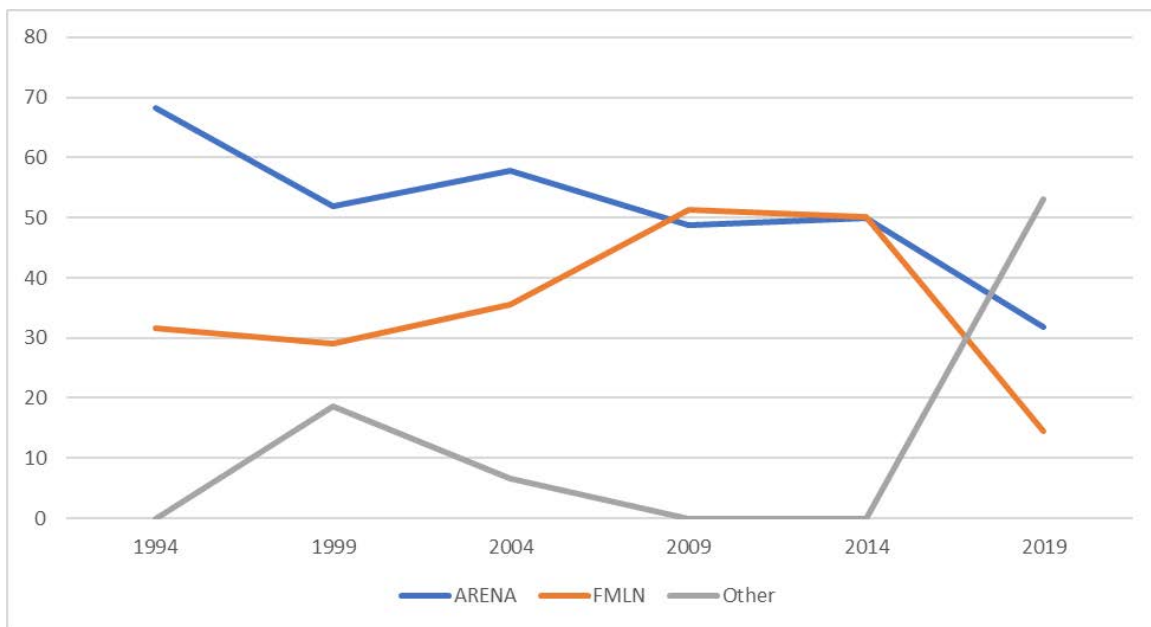


Figure 2. El Salvador’s Presidential Election Voting Shares, 1994–2019²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ de Zeeuw, “Sons of War,” 1176.

²⁵¹ Adapted from Election Guide, “Country Profile: El Salvador;” Holland, “Insurgent Successor Parties,” 292.

G. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In 1980, the FMLN emerged as one of the most powerful insurgencies ever on the American continent; however, it would be unable to seize power over the course of El Salvador's 12 years of civil war. As a result, it would have to negotiate an end to the revolution to rebuild El Salvador's political mechanisms through democracy. The result of this negotiated outcome allowed the FMLN to transition from an insurgency to political party and therefore partake in power but only through electoral competition. Over time, this led to a high degree of stability and institutionalization in El Salvador's party system by allowing parties on both the right and the left of the political spectrum to challenge for power. El Salvador represents one of the few instances of party system institutionalization in Latin America, a region traditionally marred by significant levels of electoral volatility. The country's relative success at building a stable party system may lie less on politicians' everyday decisions or intentions, and more on the legacies of compromise on which they have built their political mechanisms and organizations.

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IV. CONCLUSION

One of the baffling political aspects of Central America, and Latin America in general, has been the observably obvious and problematic struggle for political parties to build and party systems to institutionalize as democracy has taken hold within the region. As the “building blocks of representative democracy,” political parties provide the mechanism for voters to articulate their political preferences and connect with government.²⁵² They also facilitate competitive political participation that makes for healthier democracies as demonstrated by El Salvador’s robust party system and interparty competition; however, El Salvador’s case is not typical in Latin America. More often than not, these building blocks are missing in Latin American countries, and without these building blocks and their inherent competitiveness, the achievement, performance, and stability of democracy and the certainty of voter confidence in democratic governance can be significantly degraded. This leaves Latin American societies vulnerable to poor governance, authoritarianism, corruption, or even violence. In a region of the world that already struggles with high levels of inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment, the inability for democracies to consolidate because of a failed party system only serves to exacerbate these types of problems. The variation in Nicaragua and El Salvador’s cases alone certainly highlight this conundrum, but the problem is far more widespread and must be better understood if democracy is to carry on within the region.

Another baffling political aspect of Latin America has been the widespread use of insurgency as a means to wrestle away the powers of governance from the hands of the haves to the hands of the have-nots. By the time the major oscillations of insurgent movements had swept across Latin America throughout the mid- to late-twentieth century, hardly a single country was left untouched by the phenomenon.²⁵³ Insurgent warfare is dissimilar from other forms of warfare because it is inherently political. Its implicit purpose is not to necessarily gain territory or secure economic resources but to challenge those who

²⁵² Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, “Introduction,” 1.

²⁵³ Wickham-Crowley, “Winners, Losers and Also-Rans,” 133.

control political power and influence. In addition, due to its innate ability to provide advantages to those with little power in an asymmetric conflict, it is one of the only tools available for the disadvantaged to challenge the sources of power. Although a great deal of scholarly work has been done to understand the origins and outcomes of insurgent movements in Latin America, only recently have the political ramifications of insurgency been correlated to party formation within the region. The central objective to this research has been to uncover this gap and discover if and how the outcomes of these insurgencies have shaped the current party systems in Central America. The central argument derived from this investigation has been that the variation in the outcomes of these insurgencies and the resulting distributions of power, as demonstrated in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador, have indeed been central to shaping party system formation and stability within the region.

As one of only two successful insurgencies in Latin America, Nicaragua's FSLN serves to demonstrate how the outcome of insurgent success can lead to an unstable party system if the distribution of power is consolidated into the hands of an insurgent successor party, which is less than willing to relinquish its position as the vanguard party. Throughout much of Nicaragua's history, caudillos and intervention from the United States has created a political climate that benefited the few over the majority. The Somoza regime is the prime and ultimate example of this problem; however, in 1979, the FSLN was able to exploit a growing apprehension by the majority of Nicaraguans toward the regime, along a series of destabilizing events, to overthrow the dictatorial government. The result was the collapse of the old system, the rise of the FSLN political machine, and its consolidation of power as the predominant political party.

Although pluralism was allowed by the FSLN as it transitioned from revolution to democracy, its penetration into Nicaraguan society and its continual presence as the vanguard enabled the party to consolidate, while also making it difficult for other parties to coalesce and compete effectively. Collectively, these factors have sustained the party through a period of electoral losses in the 1990s and allowed it to return to power—and stay in power—in the following decade. The argument that the FSLN had deteriorated as a prevalent political party in the 1990s does not fully consider the FSLN's overarching

success in securing and maintaining power. In the long run, the FSLN has remained a dominant and formidable party in Nicaragua's party system as a result of its ability to consolidate power following its successful insurgency in 1979. This is a trend that has only increased as opposition has weakened over the past 15 years.

In contrast, the opposition parties to the FSLN were only able to maintain short-term success either through fruitless coalitions or parties based on nothing more than anti-Sandinista rhetoric, but they could have never posed lasting opposition because they lacked the same power and hegemony afforded the FSLN as a result of its successful insurgency. The UNO and Liberal Alliance coalitions that took power in 1990 and 1996, respectively, were able to do so because they had taken advantage of a loss in the FSLN's popularity due to the ongoing Contra war and because they had combined the strength of multiple parties from all ends of the political spectrum; however, each individual party within each coalition remained weak on its own and without a collective ideology both coalitions proved to be unsustainable, governmentally ineffective and unable to overtake the FSLN as the hegemonic party.

In 2001, the PLC was also able to take power despite the FSLN's best efforts because it remained primarily the only party option available after the other two coalitions had disbanded; however, it too suffered from a one-dimensional, anti-Sandinista ideology. As a result, both coalitions and the PLC were only able to take power in the short-term, and they were unable to establish lasting opposition parties, which, in turn, further hindered the party system's stability.

Unfortunately, despite a successful insurgency that was able to remove one of the most emblematic dictatorships in Latin America from power, Nicaragua remains where it has always been, under the thumb of another caudillo, that of Daniel Ortega. This thesis has demonstrated that Nicaragua's imbalanced party system is largely the product of its insurgent outcome, which concentrated power in the hands of the FSLN and weakened the opposition almost beyond repair. This uneven context for democratic competition has ultimately resulted in the consolidation of power in the hands of Ortega and the collapse of Nicaraguan democracy.

If Nicaragua's democracy hopes to escape this predicament, it must recognize that the distribution of power through a free, fair, competitive, and open party system is crucial for its rehabilitation. Strong party systems enforce legitimacy, effect good policy making, regularize patterns of competition, and give the different fractures in society the means of expression; however, building an established opposition that can meet the requirements for a successful party to create an institutionalized party system in Nicaragua will be a difficult challenge to overcome.

In the case of El Salvador, the outcome was much different. Inequality and land seizure left the majority of Salvadorans little choice than to rise up against the established oligarchy and the military regime to improve their economic conditions. However, 12 years of war and the FMLN's inability to outright seize El Salvador's political power left the FMLN insurgents and the counterinsurgent ARENA government in a state of stalemate and subsequent negotiation. This outcome forced a more even distribution of power between the two main political contenders through electoral competition. The two parties consolidated successfully, despite the tremendous polarization, distrust, and pain that defined that political period. The result has been a more stable party system because both the FMLN and ARENA were not only able to institutionalize their parties into El Salvador's political environment, but they were also able to institutionalize the political mechanisms allowing each party to be jointly recognized indiscriminately in a relatively nonpartisan system. The initial electoral results of 1994 did not necessarily give the FMLN an equal split in power, but it certainly gave it the equal opportunity it needed to formulate as a peer contender. Time has demonstrated that with this opportunity both parties have institutionalized as they have had to compete on equal terms resulting in a relatively stable party system.

A. FINDINGS

This analysis sought to uncover the observable link between the outcomes of insurgency and the current state of party system stability in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The results of the analyses were consistent with the researcher's initial expectations. In the case of Nicaragua, this research's findings determined that the successful overthrow of the

Somoza regime by the FSLN allowed Nicaragua's political power to be seized by the insurgency not only because the Somoza regime had been eliminated, but also due to the fact that there was no other significant political contender that could have challenged the FSLN's objective. Because the political parties existing prior to the Somoza regime's collapse were nothing more than fronts to give the illusion of democracy, they were too weak and unorganized to challenge the FSLN power consolidation. As a result of this imbalanced distribution of power in favor of the FMLN, an imbalanced party system formulated as Nicaragua transitioned to democracy in the early 1980s.

Additionally, this research found that the FSLN's forward-looking approach in preparation of a government takeover; its use of its own organizational structures to quickly transition from insurgency to political party; and its widespread and immediate takeover of reconstruction efforts, social organization, and humanitarian campaigns were all key elements to the FSLN's early consolidation and entrenchment as the predominant party. This type of political permeation into all facets of society by one party left little room for other parties to formulate and compete. As a result, the outcome of the FSLN's successful insurgency developed an unstable party system as demonstrated through the electoral results over the past 40 years, as this research demonstrates.

Furthermore, this research also found that the electoral victories of Violeta Chamorro, Arnaldo Alemán, and Enrique Bolaños in the 1990s and early 2000s, as monumental as they seemed, were not actually examples of party system institutionalization. In reality, they were only momentary electoral wins based outside the established realm of interparty competition and were not instances of the emergence of an institutionalized opposition as many had hoped. Each of these coalitions and parties have subsequently dissolved or declined to almost non-existence. The overall averages of the vote shares and National Assembly seats won over the past 35 years helps demonstrate this conclusion. The FSLN's vote share since 1984 has averaged to 51.66 percent in comparison to the main oppositions 35.75 percent of vote shares. Similarly, the FSLN's average number of National Assembly seats won is 51.14 percent to the opposition's 30.28 percent. More importantly, regardless of electoral outcomes, the FSLN has been not only a remarkably stable actor in the Nicaraguan party system but also its central one. Nicaragua's

party system is the FSLN. The fact that the term “main opposition,” used throughout this research’s conclusion, is comprised of all coalitions and parties and their combined averages only further strengthens this argument. If the average shares were actually divided by the different coalitions and groups, the opposition’s average would be even lower. This is a clear indicator that overtime the FSLN has actually maintained its dominance as the only truly established party in Nicaragua’s party system.

Perhaps the most troubling finding is the fact that the vote shares of the 2016 election have diverged to their highest point since 1984 indicating that the imbalance in Nicaragua’s party system is widening. This seems like cause for alarm. Without opposition, the FSLN has no competition to check its control over power. As previously stated by Levitsky and Cameron, “Where [parties] are weak... legislatures are less able to oversee the executive... and societies are less well equipped either to resist authoritarian encroachments or to remove autocratic governments.”²⁵⁴ The result of the FSLN dominance can only lead to a further rise in authoritarianism, a further breakdown of Nicaragua’s democracy, and future political conflict. This is a trend that is arguably already manifesting itself in Nicaragua as demonstrated by the recent protests and subsequent governmental backlash, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Nicaraguans since 2018.

The findings in the case of El Salvador are also as intriguing as the findings for Nicaragua, but they are perhaps a bit more optimistic. As previously mentioned in this research, the FMLN was unsuccessful in seizing power in El Salvador, but neither was it defeated militarily. Additionally, El Salvador’s oligarchic and military regime were unable to defeat the FMLN, but they still maintained their control over El Salvador’s political power. Because both parties maintained a sizable amount of military strength and popular support from the differing fractures in society, negotiation was the only alternative solution to prolonged war. This research found that this negotiation in conjunction with the FMLN and ARENA’s ability to coalesce as stable political parties were key to the stabilization and eventual institutionalization of El Salvador’s party system. This is because it forced

²⁵⁴ Levitsky and Cameron, “Democracy without Parties?,” 5.

the distribution of political power to be more evenly dispersed between the two established parties as demonstrated through El Salvador's electoral record since 1994.

It is true that the FMLN has struggled to secure the presidency until 2009 and that the overall average of presidential voting shares over the past six elections have favored ARENA; however, the more recent elections of 2009 and 2014 were neck and neck. At least in the realm of the presidential elections, these outcomes are a clear demonstration that competition is present in El Salvador's party system. In addition, the overall average of legislative seats between the two parties since 1994 is nearly equal at 32.11 percent for ARENA and 28.55 percent for the FMLN. These results are a clear indicator that both parties are able to compete without impediment and that the party system is institutionalized. This is a pleasant outcome considering El Salvador's violent past.

The significance and potential future implications of this research's findings with regard to insurgent outcomes and their effect on party systems has perhaps been overlooked in party system and party building literature since the significance of these implications has not been overtly obvious. If party system stability is still being shaped by the outcomes of insurgency 30 to 40 years after the fact, as in the case of El Salvador and Nicaragua, then more attention and research must be dedicated to understanding this phenomenon. Time has given this researcher the ability to trace the outcomes of insurgency to current political stability, but time is not on the side of countries currently dealing with ongoing political conflict and insurgency. If conflict can be negotiated so parties can share power democratically, as in the case of El Salvador, then the long-term viability of young emerging democracies could be improved. If not, then the success or failure of future insurgencies without the element of negotiation may lead emerging democracies down a path to future party system instability. With this type of knowledge in hand, organizations often involved in conflict negotiation, such as the United Nations, could more effectively shape the future stability of nations by understanding how power distribution through the outcomes of insurgency shapes future balances in power and party systems.

B. GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Although the initial findings of this analysis are promising, this research certainly has its limits. First, this theory only takes into consideration how insurgencies have affected party system stability. The ability for parties to form and coalesce into institutionalized party systems in the absence of conflict would not necessarily be explained by this theory. Other previously explained theoretical frameworks, such as Roberts's theory on market liberalization and its role in affecting the alignment or dealignment of competition, would be needed to further explain any additional reasons for party system institutionalization outside the scope of this analysis's emphasis on insurgent outcomes.²⁵⁵

Secondly, this analysis has only investigated the insurgencies that survived as political parties; however, these instances are more the exception and not the rule. Hundreds of militant groups operated in Latin America throughout the twentieth century, and only a small number of these groups actually attempted to form political parties, and of those, only a smaller number were truly successful.²⁵⁶ To fully test this theory, an assessment of every insurgency that transitioned into a political party and its corresponding opposition and party system would have to be evaluated. Unfortunately, the scope of this analysis is limited and unable to provide a complete theoretical test.

However, this theoretical limitation provides a path and direction for future research. Application of this theoretical framework to other insurgencies in Latin America and around the world could greatly expand our understanding of democratic stability following conflict. For example, the case of the URNG insurgency in Guatemala, which was briefly mentioned but not fully analyzed in this thesis, could be explored. On the surface, it appears that the URNG has neither established itself as a successful political party nor does it exist in a party system that would appear to be stable. In 2019, the URNG only secured three of the 160 seats in congress, and its presidential candidate garnered only two percent of the popular vote among 14 different candidates during the first round of

²⁵⁵ Roberts, "Market Reform."

²⁵⁶ Holland, "Insurgent Successor Parties," 276.

voting.²⁵⁷ According to Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck's system for measuring successful party building, not a single party in Guatemala since 1978 has emerged as successful.²⁵⁸ In addition, conservative elites continue to dominate the politics in Guatemala, despite the peace agreements signed in the 1990s, and many of the root causes for the civil war have remained mostly unchanged.²⁵⁹ A more thorough investigation of this case may paint a clearer picture as to how the failure of a weak insurgency affects the stability of the party system and serve as another contrast to the outcomes of insurgency that were demonstrated throughout this research in the case studies of El Salvador and Nicaragua.

²⁵⁷ "Republic of Guatemala Election for President," Election Guide, accessed September 13, 2019, <http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3151/>.

²⁵⁸ Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, "Introduction," 42–43.

²⁵⁹ Greg Grandin, Deborah T. Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby, *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 443.

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