

Indigenous Peoples and Revolutionary Movements in Mesoamerica

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Oxford Handbook of Indigenous People's Politics

Edited by José Antonio Lucero, Dale Turner, and Donna Lee VanCott

Subject: Political Science, U.S. Politics Online Publication Date: Jan 2013

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195386653.013.002

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter analyzes the three largest insurgencies with majority Indigenous participation in Mesoamerica in the twentieth century and the ensuing trajectories of native peoples' movements in these uprisings' aftermath. It reviews the 1932 peasant uprising in El Salvador, the Guatemalan insurgency from the 1970s to the 1990s, and the 1994 Chiapas rebellion in southern Mexico and the subsequent movement it generated. The essay examines why Indigenous peoples engaged at times in radical and revolutionary tactics in collective action efforts to defend their rights, while in the contemporary period we observe less violent and confrontational agendas and strategies. Furthermore, the chapter analyzes political opportunities and various forms of threat (including state repression) so as to understand the divergent framing of Indigenous demands and forms of struggle over time and across cases. The state's actions are a crucial dimension in defining what type of strategies these movements are likely to employ.

Keywords: collective action, insurgencies, political opportunities, threat repression, Indigenous peoples El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico

Armed and insurrectionary movements in Latin America involving Indigenous peoples can be traced back to pre-Colombian interethnic conflicts, to the initial resistance campaigns at the outset of the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century, and to rebellions during colonial occupation and early independence in the nineteenth century. It is during the twentieth century that we observe an upsurge in revolutionary movements emerging in the region (Wickham-Crowley 1989; Goodwin 2001). In the past century, major armed rebellions involving substantial Indigenous people's participation occurred in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Peru, while several other insurgencies draped themselves with Indigenous symbolism. The guerrilla-type uprisings emerged against the development strategies implemented by Latin American governments that accentuated the already long-existing grievances among the lower socioeconomic sectors of the population.

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In this essay, we analyze the three largest insurgencies with majority Indigenous participation in Mesoamerica in the twentieth century and the subsequent trajectories of native peoples' movements in the aftermath of these uprisings. In short, we review the 1932 peasant uprising in El Salvador, the Guatemalan insurgency from the 1970s to the 1990s, and the Chiapas rebellion in southern Mexico in 1994 and the subsequent movement it generated.¹ These three regions (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico) registered the highest densities of Indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica on the eve of the Spanish conquest (Hall and Pérez Brignoli 2003: 62). In particular, we demonstrate that these rural insurgencies in western El Salvador, the highlands of Guatemala, and southern Mexico were shaped by the sequencing of opportunities and threats in their respective environments.

A promise of state modernizing strategies in the twentieth century was not only that development programs would bring rapid economic growth to the region but also that social policies were to diminish poverty and at the same time homogenize ethnic differences into one miscegenated population group (referred to as *mestizaje*; Gould 1998). Nevertheless, the most disadvantaged population group remained the Indigenous peoples. Thus, it is not surprising that many revolutionary movements that developed in the region often incorporated an important Indigenous contingent among their forces, as well as Indigenous causes within their agendas, even late into the revolutionary process after considerable conflict, as in Sandinista Nicaragua with the establishment of regional autonomy for the Miskitu Indians on the Atlantic Coast (Hale 1994).

It is interesting to note, however, that the guerrilla-type movements that surfaced in the twentieth century often did not frame their demands under the banner of Indigenous causes, but rather using class struggle frames that sought a response to socioeconomic grievances (McClintock 1998; Brett 2008). The leftist discourse of these movements countered the interests of agrarian capitalists as well as the modernizing agenda of industrial elites (Paige 1997; Wood 2000). As these movements were associated with a variety of Marxist revolutionary ideals and strategies, that is, Leninism, Maoism, Guevarism, Trotskyism, Arbenzism,² and so on, they engaged in confrontations (often violent) with their respective states (Torres-Rivas 2011).

It was not until 1989, when the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on Indigenous people's rights raised Indigenous causes to domestic and international political agendas (and the ratification of the ILO Convention 169), that Indigenous movements throughout the Americas intensified their mobilization efforts, taking advantage of the transnational solidarity networks in their favor.³ Other transnational processes leading to Indigenous mobilization in South America before the 1990s relate to the missionary and organizational work of Protestant and Catholic churches, as well as international foundations searching for "authentic" Indigenous social structures and practices (Lucero 2006). At the same time, the fall of the Soviet bloc hindered the ideological appeal of the traditional leftist and socialist movements, programs, and strategies in Latin America. At the domestic level, Latin American states were also involved in democratic transitional

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processes that opened opportunities for previously neglected groups in society (Booth and Seligson 2009).

Since 1989, in the context of greater democratization, we have observed Indigenous movements reframing their demands (Snow 2008), deemphasizing class struggle frames, and refocusing on autonomy seeking frames and more nonviolent (but often assertive) protest strategies (Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005). It is this change in the development of Indigenous peoples' movements that we analyze in this work. We examine why Indigenous peoples engaged at times in radical and revolutionary tactics in previous collective action efforts to defend their rights, while in the contemporary period we observe less violent and confrontational agendas and strategies. This essay focuses on the different political conditions that these movements encountered and that shaped the framing of their demands. Thus, our framework involves the analysis of political opportunities and various forms of threat (including state repression) to understand the divergent framing of Indigenous demands and forms of struggle over time and across cases.

We argue that the actions of the state are a crucial dimension in defining the types of strategy that these movements have adopted. To exemplify our arguments, we focus on the revolutionary movements with high levels of Indigenous participation that developed in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. All three cases experienced revolutionary Indigenous movements under authoritarian regimes. However, the response of these states varied from co-opting tactics and surgical repressive actions in Mexico to massive repressive actions in the other two cases. In Mexico, the result was a smaller guerrilla movement that soon became part of the broader Indigenous movement, while in Guatemala and El Salvador, revolutionary organizations radicalized after their previous peaceful organizing efforts were severely repressed. However, by the 1990s and 2000s, we observe more autonomous Indigenous movements emerging in both Guatemala and El Salvador. First, we define the multidimensional concepts of *political opportunities* and *threats*. Then, we analyze how these conditions affected the development of revolutionary Indigenous-based movements in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Opportunities, Threats, and Indigenous Rebels

Political opportunities are understood as those institutions and informal power relations that if perceived as openings in the political system by dissident actors, become occasions for social movements to emerge and develop (Brockett 1991; Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1994; Meyer 2004). These openings can come in the form of institutional access, electoral realignments, elite conflicts, political allies, and the state's refraining from repressing these collective action efforts (McAdam 1996). All of these features tend to have the same effect in Western industrialized democracies. However, for movements that emerge and develop in less economically developed and authoritarian settings, this configuration of opportunities does not always create the same patterns of movement mobilization. Opportunities for mobilization in authoritarian settings are related more with liberalizing and repressive periods implemented by the prevailing regime (Almeida 2008). Liberalization

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measures such as tolerating and legalizing civil society associations and organizations and opening the electoral system to a limited degree expand the potential for collective action. Such signaling by the state allows Indigenous and native peoples space to organize and allows for the incursion of external groups into Indigenous communities for mobilization purposes. We also find that periods of regime liberalization and political openings produce more nonviolent forms of struggle and reform-type demands.

A second major inducement to mobilization involves widely perceived threats to Indigenous communities. Repressive threats (Goldstone and Tilly 2001) include not only the threats of being apprehended, imprisoned, injured, or killed but also the loss of previously gained rights if no collective action is taken (Almeida 2003; Goldstone and Tilly 2001; Koopmans 1995; Tilly 1978). In other words, in authoritarian regimes the closing of previously gained opportunities will trigger collective mobilization (Goodwin 2001). *Economic threats* also push Indigenous groups into collective action, especially over issues involving claims to ancestral and communal lands used for community subsistence and farming needs.

Whether Indigenous social movements emerge and develop under political opportunities or threats depends on how the political system incorporates dissident groups as political actors. More radical movements will tend to emerge and develop in more repressive environments and where opportunities have diminished considerably (Brockett 2005). Repressive threats shut down institutional access points and regime credibility for the use of conventional collective action strategies such as petitions and pacific street demonstrations. If state repression continues on a consistent trajectory, existing social movements will likely respond with increasingly radical ideologies and strategies, including collective violence (Goodwin 2001).

We argue that the emergence of armed movements and the participation of Indigenous peoples in these three cases follow the sequence of opportunities generated by processes of political liberalization that allowed Indigenous peasants to organize and mobilize collectively, followed by state repression against the same organizations it previously allowed to flourish. The repression of previously tolerated civil society associations and Indigenous organizations channeled them into becoming clandestine organizations with more radical discourses and means of action. Economic threats aggravated the repressive situation for these organizations, pushing them to launch violent uprisings in order to have their voices heard. Finally, democratization processes brought new opportunities for Indigenous organizations to emerge and advocate for their political rights through more institutional means and with more conventional repertoires and collective “performances” (Tarrow and Tilly 2007) as well as moderate claims.

These opportunities and threats presented themselves in different sequences in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. The particular sequencing of liberalization, repression, and economic threats has important consequences for the ability of Indigenous groups to mobilize as well as the trajectory of struggles from reformist to revolutionary pathways.

El Salvador and the Indigenous-Labor Revolt of 1932

Authoritarian Political Liberalization



Figure 01. Major Indigenous revolts in El Salvador, 1771-1918 (shaded). Source: Tilley (2005: 124-127, table 1).

Figure 1 illustrates major Indigenous people's uprisings in El Salvador between 1771 and 1918. As we will observe in Guatemala and Chiapas, Salvadoran history has endured several rounds of ethnic conflicts between ladino⁴ rulers and aggrieved Indian populations (Lauria Santiago 1999). The 1932 popular insurrection, the focus of this section, represents one of the largest Indigenous uprisings in Latin America in the twentieth century (Tilley 2005). El Salvador experienced its first major political opening in the late 1920s (1927-1930). The government allowed the formation of craft and trade unions and held a series of competitive municipal elections for the first time (Ching et al. 2007). The main labor organization, the *Federación Regional de Trabajadores* (FRT), used this opening and thaw in state repression to organize Indigenous peasants on coffee farms in western El Salvador (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). During the late 1920s, Indigenous Pipil Indians of western El Salvador maintained traditional social structures intact via the *cofradías* (religious brotherhood societies) headed by cacique spiritual and political leaders. The Pipil Indians traditionally speak Nahuatl and are the largest Indigenous group in El Salvador, though the 1930 Salvadoran Census only estimated 5.6 percent of the entire population as Indigenous (likely underestimating the size by only counting Indigenous dress or language as "Indian").⁵ The Pipil population, both groups practicing traditional cultural elements and those with Pipil ancestry but not engaging in native customs and dress, is concentrated near the major coffee-producing regions (the dominant export at the time) in the western portions of the country. The FRT co-opted some of the *cofradías* by incorporating key Indigenous leaders into the rural labor movement by the early 1930s (Kincaid 1987; Alvarenga 1996). According to 1930 census figures, the Indigenous population in the western coffee-growing departments of Ahuachapán and Sonsonate was 26 percent and 35 percent, respectively, with several of the individual municipalities in this region reaching Indigenous majorities (Ching and Tilley 1998).

The Beginning of the End of Authoritarian Opportunities

In the middle of 1930, the Great Depression began to influence political events in El Salvador. Urban and rural workers began holding unemployment marches in the cities, and the Salvadoran state began to repress them. The security forces carried out at least four major massacres of pacific demonstrations between mid-1930 and 1931 in which Indigenous peasants participated. Given the increasingly repressive climate, the FRT began to radicalize its structure and organizing techniques. Organized workers and peasants launched campaigns demanding the release of political prisoners and an end to government proclamations of states of siege (Almeida 2007). In 1930, the FRT slowly blended into the newly formed Partido Comunista de El Salvador (PCS) (Ching 1998). The PCS, the FRT, and Indigenous workers on coffee plantations continued to be persecuted and harassed by the state through 1931 (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). In early 1932, after several massacres and fraudulent municipal elections (Calderón Morán 2010), the PCS planned an insurrection to attempt to overthrow the newly installed military government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. The Indigenous communities residing in the departments of Sonsonate and Ahuachapán in western El Salvador provided the bulk of the insurgent forces when the uprising took place in mid-January 1932.

The participation of the Nahuatl-speaking Indigenous communities in the revolutionary movement of 1932 appears to be largely motivated by long-term grievances, both political and economic, with local ladino elites over issues of local land titles and municipal political authority (Ching 1998). Indigenous rural workers mobilized via the preexisting networks of the FRT whereby *indio* laborers on coffee farms were organized within the union structure. Gould and Lauria-Santiago (2008) contend that a renewed scramble for productive coffee lands by ladino agro-elites in the 1920s created impending economic threats for peasants and Indians in western El Salvador, in that they were increasingly pushed off of their subsistence plots. Hence, the growing state repression against the rural labor movement was superimposed on the economic threats of growing dispossession for the Indigenous peasantry in the western region of the country.

The revolt involved some 8,000–16,000 Indigenous peasants and rural laborers attacking the municipal offices and local military outposts of over a dozen municipalities in Sonsonate, Ahuachapán, and La Libertad, with small-scale actions attempted in Santa Ana and San Salvador (López Vallecillos 1976; Pérez Brignoli 1995; Ching 1998; Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). Four thousand insurgents alone reportedly entered the provincial capital town of Ahuachapán (Calderón Morán 2010). The Indigenous cacique leaders such as Feliciano Alma in the municipality of Izalco, Timoteo Lúe in the town of Juayúa, and Felipe Neri in the village of Nahuizalco acted as key movement brokers by encouraging their base of *cofradía* members to participate in the rebellion (López Vallecillos 1976). In a multilevel quantitative analysis of the 1932 revolt, Almeida (2007: 81) found that municipalities in departments with large Indigenous populations and coffee cultivation were more likely to participate in the rebellion.

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The Salvadoran government violently suppressed the revolt by killing an estimated 8,000–30,000 peasants within three weeks of the uprising (Anderson 1971; Tilley 2005; Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). Indigenous peasants bore the brunt of the repression, which wiped out up to 20 percent of the entire Indigenous population in the country (Montes 1979), acting as one of the largest episodes of state repression in the Western Hemisphere in the twentieth century. The massacre became firmly embedded in Salvadoran political culture, such that mestizo rebel leaders in El Salvador's guerrilla war of the late 1970s and early 1980s drew on the symbolism of 1932 in the names of their war fronts (such as Frente Feliciano Ama) and the protest music groups that attempted to mobilize the population gave their musical ensembles with such names as Banda Tepeuani, Mahucutah, Yolocamba Ita, Náhuatl, Tlatacani, and Grupo Indio (Trabanino 1993; Almeida and Urbizagástegui 1999).

A New Beginning under Liberation; Repressive and Economic Threats

Given the extreme forms of repression in 1932, the Indigenous movement did not begin to resurface with its own organizations until the mid-1960s, with the foundation of the Asociación Nacional de Indígenas Salvadoreños (ANIS) in 1965 (Tilley 2005), during a brief period of regime liberalization (Almeida 2008). However, even before the repression of 1932, traditional dress, language, and other ethnic markers were reportedly on the decline in western El Salvador (Peterson 2007). The *cofradías* continued to exist after the 1932 rebellion (Ching and Tilley 1998), in particular Lenca and Pipil enclaves, but ethnic markers of dress and language were deemphasized. A new peasant movement emerged in El Salvador in the early 1970s without a substantial Indigenous presence. In western El Salvador, the movement was largely organized by the Asociación de Trabajadores Agropecuarios y Campesinos de El Salvador (ATACES), a Communist Party-influenced peasant association. It was much weaker than its contemporaries (such as the Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (FECCAS) and the Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (UTC), which were largely organized by the Catholic Church at their inception in the largely mestizo-majority departments of San Salvador, Chalatenango, La Libertad, and Cuscatlán (Wood 2003). Perhaps the weakness of ATACES and lack of Indigenous participation in the burgeoning peasant movement of the 1970s can be attributed to the fear of organizing in the western provinces, given the memories of the 1932 Matanza, but also by the relatively low levels of the penetration of progressive Catholicism and its organizational initiatives in zones with high densities of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Lara Martínez's (2006) extensive field research in the majority-Indigenous municipality of Santo Domingo de Guzmán in Sonsonate found that rural laborers were largely organized by the conservative progovernment and U.S.-sponsored Unión Comunal Salvadoreña in the 1970s.

The Indigenous organization La Asociación Nacional de Indígenas Salvadoreños (ANIS), however, continued to grow in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the country entered a decade-long civil war (Mata and Martínez 2008). This organization benefited from the government's agrarian reform program in the early 1980s and its affiliation with the Christian Democratic Party organization—Unidad Popular Democrática. In the course of

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the mid-1980s, ANIS changed affiliation to the more left-oriented *Unidad Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños* (UNTS). In the 1990s, as the latter disappeared from the political scene, and in the post-civil war context, ANIS focused more on autonomy and Indigenous rights issues and linked to transnational Indigenous rights networks, becoming the Salvadoran chapter of the transnational movement for the claims of native peoples, as the United Nations, World Bank, and European Union showed a renewed interest in native cultures and development projects (Tilley 2002). At the same time, the Salvadoran government established a bureau of Indigenous affairs in 1995, and the Indigenous movement diversified, with the appearance of some 18 organizations purporting to represent the interests of native peoples (Peterson 2007).⁶ Many of these new Indian rights NGOs are filled with militants who participated in El Salvador's revolutionary movement in the 1970s and 1980s (*ibid.*). The Indigenous movement also benefited in the 1990s and early 2000s from the recognition by North American anthropologists that El Salvador may have a population that is 10 percent Indigenous, though many of the outward ethnic markers continue to be deemphasized (*ibid.*).

In summary, the Indigenous mobilizing in El Salvador was shaped by oscillations in regime liberalization and repression (opportunities and threats). The unprecedented political opening of the late 1920s allowed urban labor militants to coalesce with the Indigenous rural proletariat laboring on western coffee farms. When this worker-Indigenous peasant alliance initiated campaigns to improve working conditions in the early 1930s, the state shifted to a more repressive stance and suppressed public demonstrations. This radicalized the labor-Indigenous coalition into launching the 1932 uprising. The Salvadoran state responded disproportionately to the 1932 insurrection with a colossal level of violence and massacre of native peoples that ended above-ground Indigenous organizing for several decades. In the 1960s, during a period of regime liberalization, the native people's movement resurfaced and sustained an organizational presence through the end of the civil war and democratic transition of the 1990s (Mata and Martínez 2008). Official recognition of the Salvadoran Indigenous population and the forming of associations have flourished in the democratic era (1992–2012), with renewed international funding for native cultural preservation and space to organize in civil society with relatively less fear of repression.

Guatemala and Indigenous Participation in Revolutionary and Post-conflict Movements

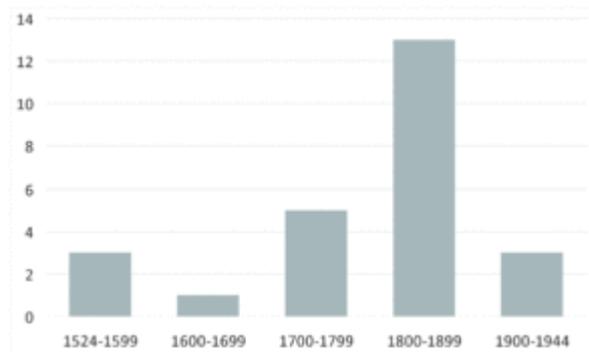


Figure 02. Major Indigenous revolts in Guatemala, 1524-1944. *Source:* Fried et al. (1983: 24-25).

Guatemala has a long history of Indigenous-based rebellions following the initial Spanish conquest (see figure 2). Moreover, a majority of the Guatemalan population are Indigenous (around 55 percent). In 1954, in order to stop the advance of agrarian reforms initiated by President Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954) but with the pretext of avoiding “communist infiltration,” the military, with the support of the United States, launched a coup d’état to replace Arbenz with a military junta (Brockett 2005). The closing of previously gained rights and opportunities (from 1944 to 1954) together with the persecution of leftist leaders forced the dissident actors to start organizing clandestinely and subsequently to adopt more radical tactics (Levinson-Estrada 1994). However, the first revolutionary organizations of the 1960s failed to integrate large numbers of Indigenous communities into their structures. In the 1970s, revolutionary leaders made a concerted effort to integrate Indigenous populations in the movement, especially in the northern and central highland departments (Vela Castañeda 2011). Indeed, the rural base of the Guatemalan insurgency was largely Indigenous by the 1980s (Bastos and Camus 2003).

As these organizations gained support in the rural areas and became capable of conducting major military operations, the Guatemalan state began to crush organizational efforts in civil society (especially Indigenous majority municipalities), even those not affiliated with the guerrillas. A cycle of violence and repression followed until the mid-1980s, when a transition electoral democracy brought a reduction in rural violence. The end of the civil war (in late 1996) allowed more conventional social movements to reemerge, and the Indigenous movement has gained salience in this more favorable context (Brett 2008). The Pan-Mayan movement has engaged in several campaigns in the post-civil-war era, ranging from Indigenous and human rights to land access and opposition to free trade treaties.

Openings under Military Authoritarianism

After the ouster of dictator Jorge Ubico Castañeda and his successor in 1944, two democratically elected governments (1945–1954) followed that gave the country 10 years of relative peace and expectations of social reforms (Yashar 1997). The progressive governments were committed to implementing social reforms that would bring greater rural development and welfare to the urban population. These two administrations are considered to have fostered a period of unprecedented regime liberalization, as they opened political opportunities to organized urban workers, the middle class, and the peasant sector.

During Juan José Arévalo's term (1945–1951) the political system opened up, and the military elite realigned. There was relative freedom of expression and of the press during this democratic interlude in the mid-twentieth century. However, the peasant sector, which encompassed the Indigenous population, remained relegated to improving their social and economic conditions, which required government investment in services, higher wages, and access to land.

Education projects started to reach the Indigenous population when the 1945 Constitution finally recognized them as Guatemalan citizens. Education in the countryside remained incipient, as state resources to fund programs and overcome the cultural and racial prejudice against the native Mayan population were slim. It was not until the passing of the agrarian reform under the Jacobo Árbenz administration that the peasant sector also enjoyed political allies in power. In June 1952, Árbenz issued a proclamation on agrarian reform, Decree 900, which stipulated that "all uncultivated land in private estates of more than 672 acres would be expropriated, idle land in estates of between 224 and 672 acres would be expropriated if less than two-thirds was under cultivation, and estates of less than 224 acres would not be affected" (Gleijeses 1991: 150). In addition, all government-owned land was to be parceled out.

By acquiring land, Indian peasants strengthened the conditions of their livelihoods as citizens. Indigenous groups began to organize and participate actively in local politics. In addition, the openings generated by the 1945 Constitution and in the Labor Code gave organized labor the opportunity to start voicing their demands using both conventional and unconventional means. Thus, protests and strikes increased both in the urban areas and *in the countryside as well*. A flurry of Indigenous organizing activity, for example, took place in San Marcos Department, where Mam speaking rural laborers (the second largest Mayan grouping after K'ichee') initiated a series of labor strikes and other forms of non-compliance on coffee plantations immediately after the revolution of 1944 (Forster 1998). As Indians gained rights as citizens, they began to mobilize and participate actively in politics.

The distribution of land not only transformed rural laborers and peasants into small landholders and stimulated the participation of peasants and labor organizations, but it also opened the door to arbitrary seizures. These actions generated disputes and reignited latent tensions between neighboring peasant communities, unions, and political parties, in addition to the primary hostility that this agrarian reform created with the landed elite

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and the U.S.-based United Fruit Company (Grandin 2000). Árbenz also implemented mechanisms to facilitate agricultural credits and technical assistance to peasants in order to motivate rural producers to increase the productivity of the newly acquired land.

Military Repression and Guerrilla Formation



Figure 03. Sixty-sixth anniversary march of October 1944 Revolution, Guatemala City, October 20, 2010 (photo by Paul Almeida).

Árbenz's reforms and development projects were interrupted by his ousting from power in 1954 via a U.S.-sponsored military coup. In many instances, the agrarian reform was reversed, as many beneficiaries lost their property rights and labor and peasant leaders were persecuted, jailed, or assassinated. While the reforms implemented by the Árbenz regime empowered the labor and peasant sectors, they also accentuated the polarization of the Guatemalan society and enraged the elite. The land seizures of the counterrevolution led by Castillo Armas were resisted by the peasant beneficiaries of the agrarian reform, with the support of workers organizing with machetes and sticks into improvised militias (Jonas 1991). In 2010, the 1944 October Revolution remains an annual celebration for the popular sectors of Guatemala, including highland Indigenous communities with a history of rebellion in recent decades (see figure 3).

The closure of all previously gained benefits and rights forced the opposition to radicalize its tactics. Many professionals, intellectuals, students, and professors sympathetic with the popular classes were also persecuted, but most of the repression was targeted at organized workers and peasants.

In the 1960s, two guerrilla organizations appeared in response to the state repression in the years following the 1954 coup. In 1962, the MR-13 was formed in the Izabal zone of Eastern Guatemala, and the Partido Guatemalteco de los Trabajadores (PGT) also formed its own armed group, the (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes). Most of the members of both organizations were not Indigenous but were ladino peasants, as well as students and former military officers (Wickham-Crowley 1989). Nevertheless, the repression against these initial insurgent efforts did not discriminate, and the guerrillas as well as any other popu-

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lar organization effort were nearly eliminated with terror tactics by the late 1960s after a successful counterinsurgent campaign (Black et al. 1984). As Rasler (1996) and Goldstone and Tilly (2001) have suggested, repressive actions had a negative impact on short-term rebellious activity but in the long run helped intensify insurgency.

By the 1970s, Indian as well as ladino peasants had learned from previous experiences and mistakes. In the 1970s, the new guerilla organizations were composed by Indian leadership as well as significant numbers of Indians in the rank and file. The increase of Mayan participation among the guerilla groups was also due to the unintended consequence of the influence that liberation-theology-guided missionaries had through their consciousness-raising activity throughout the 1960s (Falla 2001). This missionary activity constituted the antecedents of the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC; Jonas 1991), which acted as a key peasant organization in the late 1970s due to its unprecedented capacity to mobilize across several different Mayan groups (Grandin 1997). Peasant leagues were organized, and the Christian base communities became politicized. This provided a vast network among Indigenous communities, which strengthened after the 1976 earthquake when new self-help organizations emerged for the reconstruction of the affected areas. Later, the new guerrilla organizations used the same relationships to recruit and maintain the support from several Indigenous communities in the western highlands, especially in the departments of Quiché and Huehuetenango. Indeed, by 1981 the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres's "Ernesto Guevara" Front's organizational activities reached 20 of Huehuetenango's 31 municipalities and coordinated with five different linguistic communities, including Q'ajob'al, Chuj, Akateka, Poptí, and Mam (Hurtado Paz y Paz 2011: 38).

Mayan mobilization occurred on other less contentious political fronts in the 1970s on an unprecedented scale. A number of Indigenous mayors were elected throughout municipalities in the *altiplano*, at first with the assistance of the Christian Democratic Party. In addition, urban and professional Indigenous leaders convoked annual national Mayan cultural conferences, while renewed emphasis was placed on preserving Mayan dialects and cultural practices (Bastos and Camus 2003). In a major historical precedent in 1980, the first pan-Mayan public statement was issued in Iximché, Tecpán, and Chimaltenango, sponsored by the CUC, Movimiento Indígena Tojil, Asociación Pro-Cultura Maya Quiché, and Coordinadora Indígena. The document denounced nearly five hundred years of ethnic discrimination, exclusion, and repression (Maclean 2011).

The above-ground CUC peasant association became a "subversive" organization on the plantations of the pacific lowlands led mostly by Indians after being repressed in 1978 with the massacre at Panzós in Alta Verapaz, when a group of Indians protested against land evictions performed by the military in the region (Grandin 2004). This event was intended to deter any future protest and mobilization efforts. However, it became the trigger for a cycle of further insurgency and repression. A second event helped encourage the radicalization of popular movements. The burning of the Spanish embassy in the capital in January 1980, in which the protesting Indigenous peasants died, triggered further rebellious activity. Indigenous regions became not only members of the CUC but also

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base communities for guerrilla organizations, and their people even joined the militias in particular municipalities in the departments of El Quiché, Solalá, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, and Alta and Baja Verapaz (Paige 1983). Most important, the defense of Mayan ethnic identity and culture became the mobilizing frame. Not only had they been economically oppressed and politically relegated, but they were defending themselves against an ethnic oppression. The regions of Indigenous organizing, both armed and unarmed, bore the brunt of state-sponsored violence from the late 1970s until the mid-1990s, including scorched-earth campaigns, community-wide massacres, and forced disappearances (Figueroa Ibarra 1999).

In the 1970s, the EGP and the La Organización del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA) became the guerrilla organizations with the largest Indian base in the western and northwestern highlands. These two groups learned from the lessons of the 1960s that not organizing Indigenous communities in large numbers left revolutionary organizations without a mass rural base (Le Bot 1995). Both revolutionary groups spent much of the 1970s quietly recruiting Indigenous communities and organizing before demonstrating a public presence at the end of the decade (Black et al. 1984). Together with the FAR and the PGT, the ORPA and the EGP launched a platform in 1982 for a unified revolutionary government under the coordination of the La Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), similar to that of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But by now state repressive actions had taken genocidal proportions, and the base communities in the highlands were not prepared to defend themselves against such a military offensive (Jonas 1991). The guerrilla organizations started to lose not only their bases but also their capacity to coordinate actions with the urban and more moderate forces, such as unions, middle-class organizations, and opposition groups. Again with the support of the United States, this time the administration of President Ronald Reagan, the Guatemalan government and the army had regained the upper hand with the employment of counterinsurgent security forces, paramilitary patrols, and death squads.

Democratization and Indigenous Organizations

The counterinsurgent strategy however, needed a political solution as well. Given the proportion of the repressive actions, no peace agreement could be reached between the guerrillas and the government, which had conducted the massacres, over 80 percent of whose victims had been Indigenous peasants. Thus, the military government was replaced by a civilian one via the Constitutional Assembly of 1985, in order to control the legitimacy crisis that ruling by repression without social consensus had generated. The economy of the country entered a foreign debt crisis, and the reconstruction required significant international financial assistance. In order to obtain international aid, Guatemala needed an elected civilian government that would build internal and external legitimacy and stability and restore investors' confidence. The election of Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo in 1985, although not fully representative or free, opened the door for the liberalization of the political environment again (Brett 2008). Still, the peace agreement with the guerrillas was not reached until 1996, with help from the U.N.-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification, which declared that the killings had been genocidal, with 83 percent of

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the 150,000–200,000 civilian deaths suffered by Indigenous peoples (Torres Rivas 2007). The U.S. government under President Clinton recognized its mistake of supporting the counterinsurgent activities, and the guerrillas agreed to cease operations as an insurgent army and to compete in institutionalized electoral politics.

The electoral opening in 1985, together with the ILO Convention 169 in 1989, opened the door for the articulation of identity rights. Within the deepening of the democratization process, the state needed to open institutional channels for the representation of previously neglected interests—Indigenous rights included. In addition, Rigoberta Menchú's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 together with the peace agreement enacted in 1996 presented new opportunities for the Indigenous movement in Guatemala to reach supporters outside its borders. Local human rights NGOs finally became effective and were able to reach international advocacy groups (Brett 2008). At the same time, a new wave of pan-Mayan activism emerged along with popular Mayan movements connected to the traditional left and insurgent groups (Warren 1998). Nevertheless, the success of the movement has remained incipient.

According to Quino (2006) and Pocop (2006), this is an unintended consequence of the democratization process. Although the Indigenous leaders are legitimate political actors, political access limits wider objectives, as they have to compete now with many other demands for the same institutional spaces of representation. This has reduced the opportunities to achieve significant successes. Quino and Pocop also suggest that the demands presented during the peace accords have been diluted and have not been transformed into effective public policies that resolve the Indigenous people's needs, especially issues over land, subsistence, and livelihood (Brett 2008). Demands are tolerated as long as they do not threaten democratic governability, economic distribution, or the global neoliberal order (Hale 2006). Thus, Indigenous leaders have toned down their demands. Although globalization has helped ethnic causes to reach supporters and advocacy networks beyond their borders, the niche that ethnic identities have been able to gain is minimal compared to the force of other global movements, such as the movement against human rights abuses under military regimes in Chile and Argentina (Loveman 1998). According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), international advocacy networks are only effective when local advocacy groups are strong and when a foreign state, over which an international advocacy network has influence, maintains significant vested interests in the country where the abuses are taking place (see also Bob 2005). In the case of Guatemala, local Indigenous peoples NGOs appeared largely after regime liberalization in the 1980s and then expanded rapidly with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, but their effectiveness remains questionable. The international pressure over Guatemala focused on the pacification of the country (Dunkerley 1994), not over the fulfillment of Indigenous demands. Between 2005 and 2011, a renewed round of organizing took place in the Guatemalan *altiplano* over the use of native lands for biofuel crops, mining activities (Esquit 2010), and massive hydroelectric energy projects—clearly a major cleavage for new social conflicts in the twenty-first century. Literally dozens of popular referendums (*consultas comunitarias*)

have taken place in Huehuetenango, Quiché, and San Marcos departments on the approval/disapproval of mining operations on Indigenous territory (Véliz 2009).

Mexico and the Chiapas Rebellion

Corporatist Openings for Indians and Peasants

The Mexican case exemplifies how an authoritarian government managed the opening of opportunities and regime liberalization under a corporatist structure of interest representation, with relative stability for much of the twentieth century under the official party structure. After its creation in 1929, the official party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) grouped the peasant, labor, and popular interests into confederations of unions and organizations. Between 1930 and 1970, the state gave workers, peasants, and Indians the opportunity of organization and political participation through these confederations. However, they lacked autonomy and economic independence from the state. In terms of political opportunities, they had political access within relatively stable elite alignments, and a long-lasting political ally in power. However, these opportunities were severely constrained by clientelistic practices within the official party to distribute political candidacies, legislative seats, and benefits among confederations. In addition, the state enacted severe and discretionary repressive measures against dissident or rebellious voices within the labor and peasant sectors, as well as among Indigenous communities.⁷

Especially critical to the nascent Indigenous movement was the establishment in 1968 of the state institution the Confederación Nacional de Comunidades Indígenas, which suggested the state's recognition for the first time of the need for the self-determination of native peoples. However, this *indigenista* policy encompassed all social programs directed specifically to Indigenous populations with the intention of assimilating them into the mestizo culture and standards of living. Many different organizations flourished. All of them, with few exceptions, were under the controlled sponsorship of the state coordinated by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista. Because the majority of Indigenous peoples live in rural areas, Indians were first considered peasants, and second, members of different ethnic groups.

The different confederations and state agencies in charge of channeling labor, peasant, and Indigenous demands, together with the economic model of development based on an import-substitution industrialization strategy, sustained the social pact in Mexico beginning in the 1930s, as the conflicting interests of the different sectors of society were able to find some niches of representation within the official party. The rationale behind this arrangement was that if civil society's demands were not heard in the present, the corporatist structure of interest representation ensured that the demands of all sectors represented were to be heard and redistributive benefits would reach them some day (Collier and Collier 2005). For the rural sector, the most important policy of the state to gain legitimacy was agrarian reform, which was intended to fulfill the revolutionary ideal, set in the 1917 Constitution, of distributing land to peasants in the communal form of *ejidos*

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(communal lands) (van der Haar 2005; Washbrook 2005). Agrarian reform, together with credit policies and infrastructural supports, was set in motion to activate peasant agriculture. However, this agricultural production was not intended to fulfill agribusiness markets but only to function as subsistence farming and as a social appeasing mechanism.

As a reaction to the official *indigenista* policies implemented between the 1940s and the 1970s, those peasant and Indigenous organizations that had been marginalized from the corporate system of the PRI started advocating *indianista* policies seeking the liberation of the Indian as a member of Indigenous civilization with different needs from those who had been assimilated by state structures (Leyva 2005; Velasco 2003). Instead of trying to blur the social and ethnic differences across the diversity of groups in the country, *indianismo* called not only for the recognition of those differences but for their politicization. In order to make Indian civilization a viable alternative vis-à-vis the state project of integration, *indianistas* had to launch a campaign of revalorization of Indian identities so that the various native groups could become recognized as political actors (Velasco 2003).

As independent Indigenous leadership and some guerrilla organizations were growing during the 1970s, the state responded to the more moderate voices with co-optation and to more radical groups, like the short-lived guerrilla force led by Lucio Cabañas in Guerrero, with repressive tactics. In 1974, the state-sponsored First Indigenous Congress was organized in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. The governor of the state invited Bishop Samuel Ruiz to organize the meeting with the intention of co-opting the emerging independent Indigenous leaders into the existing corporate institutions of the state. The new Indigenous leadership, however, had already moved independently from the state, and the 1974 gathering only helped the opposition movement to expand its base of support. The 1974 conference also allowed Indigenous and peasant leaders to come together and find common ground on their grievances about agrarian and labor issues, education, access to markets, public health and education, corruption, and the arbitrariness of the state authorities (Washbrook 2005).

The Indigenous movement resisted radicalization, despite the sporadic formation of guerrilla-type organizations in the 1970s, as the state successfully applied its repressive force to those insurgents in central Mexico who failed to penetrate majority Indigenous communities. At the same time, the PRI continued with its co-optive efforts. The Zapatistas' uprising in 1994 was another short-lived guerrilla effort. The social movement that emerged after the cease-fire immediately turned to more nonviolent protest tactics, given that political conditions changed dramatically in the region and the country at large (Inclán 2008, 2009a).

Economic Threats and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

During the 1980s, two severe financial crises (1982 and 1987) forced the state to abandon the welfare-state-like policies that had held together the social pact since the aftermath of the 1910 Revolution. Financial crises also accentuated the ancestral inequalities among the Mexican population. The restructuring measures put in place by the govern-

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ment did very little to ameliorate this trend. National industries were privatized, free trade mechanisms were reintroduced, and social expenditures were severely reduced (Collier and Quaratiello 1994; Teichman 1995). Credits and infrastructural supports were cut back, international markets were now setting crop prices, and land redistribution came to a halt. Subsistence agriculture was destined to disappear. As the state was losing its grip over its co-opted and corporatist structures of interest representation, peasant organizations started to seek other strategies and tactics to articulate and have their demands represented. Members of corporatist as well as independent organizations became disillusioned with their organizations' ineffectiveness at achieving their political and economic goals. Conflicts between popular and rural organizations over land and credit disputes, as well as conflicts within these organizations over goals, accelerated their fragmentation (Collier and Quaratiello 1994; Harvey 1998; Legorreta 1998; Estrada 2008). Some of these organizations' members came to see the clandestine organization of a guerrilla movement as the only way out of what had become an unbearable situation in terms of securing an economic livelihood (Collier and Quaratiello 1994; Harvey 1998; Legorreta 1998;). The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) exploited cleavages in peasants' interests and reoriented their efforts to overcome their grievances to an armed solution. The migration of Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Tojolabal peoples into the Lacandon area beginning in the 1970s, together with the immigration of Guatemalan refugees in the 1980s and early 1990s, accentuated the need for land, and tensions soon rose between these communities, the state, and the Lacandon people who lived in the protected forest area, as the government continued to follow its discretionary ways of allocating land, credits, and organization benefits (Collier and Quaratiello 1994, Harvey 1998).⁸

The guerrilla organization worked clandestinely during the 1980s and early 1990s. On January 1, 1994, its members took up arms in seven towns in Chiapas,⁹ the southernmost state of Mexico. The images of war between the two unbalanced forces portrayed on television and the Internet outraged viewers both inside and outside of Mexico and generated massive demonstrations demanding an end to hostilities against the poorly armed guerrilla group. After 12 days of fighting, the Mexican government declared a cease-fire, which both parties agreed to and have respected ever since. For their part, the Zapatistas agreed to return to their headquarters in the Lacandon jungle, but a military siege was set up around them.



Figure 04. Zapatista cycle of protests in Chiapas, 1994–2003. Source: Inclán (2008: 1320, fig. 1).

Public demonstrations soon turned into a cycle of protest that accompanied talks between the EZLN and the Mexican government and beyond, until 2003, when the Zapatistas announced the inauguration of their autonomous authority structures, the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*, in response to the fact that negotiations had stalled in 1997 and failed to resume thereafter. Figure 4 shows a map of the number of protests held throughout Chiapas from 1994 to 2003. Protests denounced the lack of recognition of Indigenous rights, and the issue of political autonomy continued to go unattended, despite periods of negotiations and democratic openings at the local and national levels. The presence of the army steadily increased in the region in order to constrain the expansion of the EZLN's influence.

Dialogues, Democratization, and the Struggle for Indigenous Rights

To return to 1994: the first round of talks took place from February 21 to March 2 of that year. Its main achievement included the recognition of two Zapatista *zonas francas*: one in San Miguel, Ocosingo, and another in Guadalupe Tepeyac, Las Margaritas. This initial concession was intended to stop the large number of land invasions that took place right after the uprising. Both Zapatista-sympathizing and other peasant organizations had taken advantage of the uprising's "surprise factor" to invade numerous parcels of land. Subsequently, however, the Mexican government, landowners, and peasants all signed an agreement promising to resolve land invasions that had occurred up to April 14, 1994 (Villafuerte et al. 1999). In this agreement, peasants promised to stop invading parcels of land, and the government promised to compensate landowners for the land that peasants had confiscated from them. This agreement terminated most land invasions, but protesters also had to change tactics due to the newly created *zonas francas*. However, as noted, negotiations broke down again in late 1994. For the Zapatistas, these overtures fell short of responding to the causes that had led to the uprising.

In March 1995, President Ernesto Zedillo signed the Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and Just Peace in Chiapas, which guaranteed the suspension of military operations and arrest

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warrants against EZLN leaders for as long as the dialogue between the parties continued. The following month, the San Andrés Dialogues began in San Andrés Larráinzar. The talks were again a major mobilizing event, as the EZLN invited a large group of advisors to take part in the different negotiating tables, and Indigenous communities were mobilized as security shields. Meetings and marches surrounded these events. In September 1995, the parties agreed on six different topics that needed to be addressed in different rounds of negotiations: (1) Indigenous rights and culture, (2) democracy and justice, (3) wealth and development, (4) reconciliation in Chiapas, (5) women's rights in Chiapas, and (6) the cessation of hostilities. In February 1996, the first set of accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture—the San Andrés Accords—were signed. In March, the rounds of talks on democracy and justice were supposed to start. The EZLN tried to use this second round of talks to broaden the scope of their demands to the national level, but the government aimed to keep these issues at the local and state levels only.¹⁰ The clear difference between the two perspectives soon brought negotiations to a gridlock, and finally to an impasse, when the federal government refused to recognize the San Andrés Accords in September 1997. The government's decision not to honor the accords ended all negotiating talks and made recognition of the San Andrés pact and Indigenous rights the emblematic demand of all subsequent demonstrations in support of the Zapatista movement.

While the federal government was granting procedural concessions to ease the pressure of the movement's demands, military positions in the region to control the spread of the EZLN influence had been steadily increasing in the late 1990s. The federal government's repressive and co-optive efforts to control the spread of the movement resulted in inter- and intracommunity conflicts. These hostilities reached a peak in December 1997, when 45 Zapatista sympathizers (mostly women and children) were killed by anti-Zapatista villagers in Acteal. Protests decreased significantly. Nevertheless, although in smaller numbers, from 1998 to 2003 protesters took to the streets again, now using roadblocks, seizures of buildings, and sit-ins to demand the recognition of the San Andrés Accords, the withdrawal of the army from the region, a stop in hostilities, and an investigation into the Acteal massacre.

A renewed round of protests occurred after the victory in 2000 of Vicente Fox, the first presidential candidate who did not belong to the PRI. Fox's victory brought new hope to the Zapatista movement because he had promised in his presidential campaign to resolve the Chiapas conflict by honoring the San Andrés Accords and to send to the Mexican Congress the Indigenous Rights Bill, which had been drafted after the Accords in 1996 by the Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación.¹¹ The EZLN responded positively to the proposal to resume the interrupted dialogue but set forth two more conditions: withdrawal of seven of the military positions surrounding the Zapatista territory and liberation of all Zapatista prisoners (Subcomandante Marcos 2000).¹² Once in office, President Fox withdrew the army from the seven points surrounding the EZLN headquarters in the Lacandón jungle and many checkpoints across the state of Chiapas, sent the Indigenous Rights Bill to Congress, and liberated all Zapatista prisoners without criminal charges.¹³ Protests recurred in support of the Indigenous Rights Bill in the summer of 2001. However, this propitious period of openings was short-lived. The end result of the deliberation on the Indigenous

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Law in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies was a diluted version of the San Andrés Accords. Neither the Zapatistas nor the Indigenous movement in Mexico accepted the approved bill (Velasco 2003). All possibilities to resume negotiating talks faded away. The Zapatista wave of protest lost momentum, and the Zapatistas, feeling betrayed again, turned to the construction of their own vision of autonomous communities in the creation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno located in the five Zapatista regional capitals, the Aguascalientes, now renamed Caracoles. In January 2006, the EZLN launched La Otra Campaña, aiming at constructing a national movement in favor of direct democracy.

Meanwhile, various electoral reforms had been implemented in the 1990s to guarantee the fairness and transparency of electoral processes. In 1997, the PRI lost its absolute majority in Congress for the first time since 1929. As noted, Vicente Fox of the Partido Acción Nacional won the presidency in 2000 in what are now considered the first free and fair presidential elections in the country. In the case of Chiapas, by 2001 the PRI had lost a total of 46 municipalities there to other parties. Electoral openings, however, did not bring the expected representation opportunities to previously neglected voices, like the Zapatistas, so the Mexican democratization remained an incomplete transition. No political party has embraced the Zapatista demands, and since 2006 the EZLN's Otra Campaña has advocated for a direct instead of a representative democracy. The results of this have been the creation of parallel structures of authority in the region, a growing disillusion with political parties and representative democracy, the alienation of Zapatista communities, and the perpetration of the conditions in Chiapas that gave birth to the Zapatista uprising in 1994 (Inclán 2009b). The Indigenous movement has lost momentum within the national politics agenda. It has survived, though, at the margins, through the support from the networks La Otra Campaña has built with other organizations throughout the country.

Conclusion

The major revolutionary movements in the twentieth century with substantial Indigenous participation in Mesoamerica occurred in western El Salvador, northwestern Guatemala, and in the highlands and the Lacandon forest in Chiapas: the zones with the highest densities of native peoples on the eve of the Spanish conquest. In western El Salvador in late 1920s, in the highlands of Guatemala in the 1970s, and in Chiapas in the early 1990s, land access and land security were vital issues for native people's struggle to scrape out their livelihoods in these regions.

In El Salvador, after a brief period of government reforms that allowed labor organizers to reach into rural communities, both dwindling access to communal and cultivable lands and increasing state repression drove Indigenous groups of Pipil ancestry to join the insurrection of 1932, making up the bulk of the rebels. The Salvadoran state's ethnocidal response to the Indigenous/worker uprising, along with sustained military rule, precluded native people's organizing for several decades. In Guatemala, the 10-year "spring" of state liberalization from 1944 to 1954 provided political opportunities for independent or-

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ganizations to emerge and mobilize. Later, the closure of these previously gained rights and other economic issues such as land access pushed the mobilizing agenda toward more radical claims and means. The Catholic Church's programs in the late 1960s, such as cooperatives, also influenced highland regions where revolutionary organizations such as the EGP and ORPA would later settle in the 1970s. However, in Guatemala, it was largely the state repression being way out of proportion to insurgent capacity that drove some Indigenous communities, such as the Ixil, to collaborate with revolutionary organizations that were seeking greater participation for Guatemala's native majority in the insurgent movement of the late 1970s and 1980s (Brett 2007). In Mexico, large guerrilla organizations did not emerge due to the corporatist system of interest representation implemented by the PRI over its more than 70 years of rule. The co-optation of interests successfully stabilized the incorporation of workers', peasants', and Indigenous people's claims. Economic crises made the state incapable of controlling social demands and distributing benefits to its base of corporatist support. When external political groups and revolutionary organizations approached Indigenous populations in the Lacandon region of Chiapas, the land situation and recent educational and consciousness-raising programs by the progressive Catholic Church made many native groups receptive to the appeals of revolutionaries such as the EZLN.

In all three countries, democratization processes in the 1990s and 2000s have created the political conditions for Indigenous-based organizations to carry on largely nonviolent campaigns for land, reparations, and sovereignty. In addition, with Indigenous movements constructing relatively more autonomous organizations vis-à-vis their former revolutionary allies, renewed demands for state recognition of Indigenous rights, language, and culture are gaining prominence in the region in the early twenty-first century.

Comparing the three major Indigenous revolutionary movements in Mesoamerica illustrates that periods of regime liberalization offer opportunities for allies of Indigenous people to assist in mobilization efforts. Labor reforms in El Salvador in the late 1920s permitted urban union organizers to penetrate Indigenous communities proximate to coffee farms in western portions of the country. The Guatemalan government's mass sponsorship and invitation of Catholic Church organizations into the highlands in the 1960s assisted in the growth of Indigenous-based cooperatives and, later, rural labor organizations such as the CUC (Brockett 2005). Finally, the liberalization of the Mexican polity, the weakening of the corporatist system, and acknowledgment of Indigenous rights allowed the progressive Catholic Church and radical activists to penetrate and organize Indigenous communities in Chiapas.

We also observe substantial variation across our three cases of Indigenous mobilization in relation to the threats of state repression. In El Salvador, state repression first radicalized the nonviolent rural movement of the early 1930s culminating in the 1932 mass revolt. The escalation of state repression in response to the insurrection reached ethnocidal proportions that wiped out mass mobilization. In Guatemala, state repression against Indigenous communities also radicalized the popular movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The massive levels of state violence unleashed by the Guatemalan military in the

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early 1980s greatly weakened the revolutionary movement and Indigenous resistance until the 1990s, when liberalization returned. In Chiapas, the combined strategy of selective repression and negotiation resulted in sustained mobilization, with largely nonviolent and disruptive protest by the EZLN and its supporters (Inclán 2009b, 2012).

Hence, a general pattern emerges from our three cases in relation to state violence. State repression alone radicalizes previously organized Indigenous communities, moving their organizations from more reform-minded mobilizing strategies to revolutionary ones (i.e., El Salvador in the early 1930s and Guatemala in the late 1970s). Massive state repression that approaches genocidal levels, as in El Salvador in 1932 and Guatemala in the early 1980s, destroys or greatly weakens native people's capacity to organize. A mix of repression and negotiation by state actors results in more pacific (but often assertive) organizing strategies, as witnessed in the Zapatista cycle of protest between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s.

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Notes:

(1) We also acknowledge Indigenous people's participation in the Nicaraguan revolution in the 1970s and Miskito participation in various factions of the Contra counterinsurgency in the 1980s. The three rebellions in this essay all involve a majority of Indigenous people as the main protagonists, as opposed to mestizos and other ethnic compositions.

(2) Although Arbenz's policies were inspired in socialist ideals and can be considered to have been "progressive" at the time, they never based the accomplishment of the workers' demands on the use of revolutionary or violent means. The mobilization of workers and movements that developed later, however, based their ideology on Arbenz's ideals and goals. Therefore, we consider the movements that developed in Guatemala to be Arbenzist movements.

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- (3) We acknowledge that Indigenous organizing was taking place in the 1960s and 1970s (before ILO Convention 169) in particular locations such as the Ecuadorean Andes (Yashar 2005).
- (4) This term is used to define the miscegenated population who are not Indian but not Spanish either and who have acquired “Western” values and costumes and speak Spanish.
- (5) Smaller populations of Lenca Indians reside in the Eastern Department of Morazán.
- (6) See Tilley (2002) for a listing of these newer Indigenous organizations.
- (7) Other examples of discretionary controls and permissions granted by the PRI at the regional level can be found in Todd Eisenstadt’s (1999) work on subnational politics in Tabasco.
- (8) See Jeffrey W. Rubin’s (1997) and Richard Snyder’s (1999) works on Indigenous and peasant organizations in Oaxaca for another example of independent organization efforts allowed by the PRI regime.
- (9) Attacks were launched to take over the municipal offices of Altamirano, Chanal, Huixtán, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Oxchuc, and San Cristóbal de Las Casas, as well as the Rancho Nuevo regional military base.
- (10) María de la Luz Inclán’s interview with the government’s peace negotiator at the time the Accords were signed, Mexico City, October 2002.
- (11) This commission was formed by legislators from all parties in Congress so as to give it independence from the executive power.
- (12) According to CIEPAC (2003), the seven military bases removed from the Zapatista territory were those located in Amador Hernández (Ocosingo), Guadalupe Tepeyac (Las Margaritas), Río Euseba (Las Margaritas), Jolnachoj (San Andrés Larraínzar), Roberto Barrios (Palenque), La Garrucha (Ocosingo), and Cuxuljá (Ocosingo).
- (13) Interview with Chiapas senator, member of the Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación (2000–2006), Mexico City, October 2002.

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