

Reform Vs. Repression as Counterinsurgency Strategies in El Salvador, 1979-1992

“No group is more conservative than a landowning peasantry, and none is more revolutionary than a peasantry that owns too little land or pays too high a rental.”

Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968:375)

Land Reform and Democracy as Counterinsurgency

With a civil war emerging in El Salvador, a military coup in 1979 brought to power a junta committed to a two-pronged strategy to compete with the FMLN guerrillas for the political support of the rural population.

Democratization: elections in 1982 to choose an assembly that would write a new constitution, with presidential and legislative elections to follow in 1984.

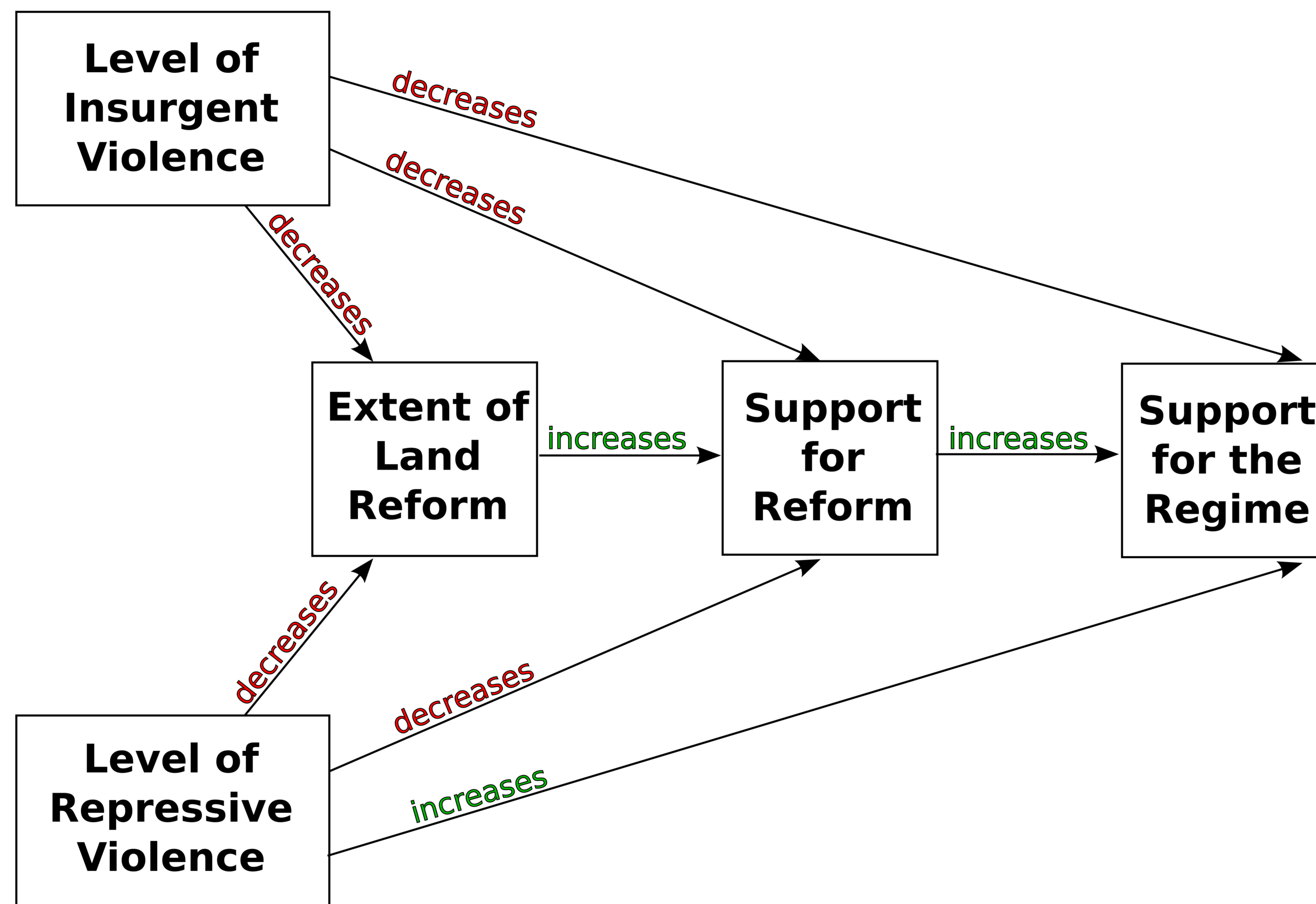
Land Reform: a three-phase land reform program that would provide land to 100,000 to 200,000 rural households.

Death Squad Violence

Opponents of reform, including conservative elements of the military and the landed elite, used death squad violence for three purposes:

- To deter eligible peasants from applying for land reform benefits;
- To push farmers to abandon their land, eliminating the need for land reform;
- To intimidate voters into withholding support for pro-reform parties and into voting for anti-reform parties.

The Model: Competing Effects of Land Reform vs. Death Squad Violence on Political Loyalties of Rural Populations



By examining the critical links between both political violence and land reform on the one hand, and peasant political loyalties on the other, this study will allow us to examine the contingent nature of land reform's remedial effects: even someone who received land under an agrarian reform program is unlikely to remain loyal to the government if applying for land makes one a target for death squad violence by the state and its paramilitary surrogates.

Land reform should:

- Increase support for the regime vs. the rebels (election participation)
- Increase support for pro-reform vs. anti-reform parties.

Death squad violence should:

- Decrease applications for land reform benefits
- Decrease support for pro-reform parties
- Increase voter turnout

Timeline of events

Total Dead	Annual Dead	Events
4	4	1979 Revolutionary Government Junta takes power
4963	4959	1980 Protest attacked by National Guard Archbishop Romero assassinated Sumpul River Massacre FDR calls general strike 4 Catholic nuns raped/murdered
9288	4325	1981 1st FMLN offensive US military aid restored Lempa River Massacre Atlatcatl Bn. El Mozote Massacre
12317	3029	1982 Constituent Assembly elections San Vicente 'pacification' campaign ESAF counteroffensive
13775	1458	1983 FMLN offensive in Morazan Guerrillas offer to negotiate Assembly approves constitution
14517	742	1984 Presidential & legislative elections Duarte (PDC) elected in runoff Talks between Duarte & FMLN 2nd round of government/FMLN peace talks
14851	334	1985 Legislature & local elections FMLN kills 4 US Marines
15636	386	1987 Herbert Anaya assassinated
16123	487	1988 Legislative elections
16528	405	1989 Presidential election FMLN 'final offensive' FMLN captures part of San Salvador Jesuit murders by Atlatcatl Bn.
16883	104	1991 Negotiations resume
16895	12	1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords signed

