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The Peace Accords Ten Years Later: A Citizens' Perspective[1]

The peace accords, signed at Chapultepec Castle on January 16, 1992, constitute the single most important political event in contemporary Salvadoran history. The significance of the agreement lies not only in its role in ending a prolonged and cruel civil war, but also in that it went beyond simply achieving a cease-fire between the parties to the conflict.

The accord was the culmination of a negotiation process that had entered into its final phase with the signing of the Geneva Accord of April 1990. Its core objectives were to end the armed conflict through political means, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights, and reunify Salvadoran society. Each of these aspects is addressed in different sections of the final agreement. The end of the war, which is explicitly laid out in Chapter VII on "Cessation of the Armed Conflict," is also envisioned throughout the text of the agreement. The goal of democratization of the country is demonstrated in the number of initiatives aimed at restructuring national institutions. These include the creation of a Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, a National Civilian Police, and the National Council of the Judiciary, as well as the inclusion of a brief chapter on the need for reform of the electoral system. To allow for full respect for human rights, the treaty redefined the role of the armed forces, eliminated the security forces, created the National Civilian Police, provided for the FMLN's political integration, and, most importantly, created the office of the human rights ombudsman. Finally, with regard to the reunification of Salvadoran society, the peace accords state that "one of the prerequisites for the democratic reunification of Salvadoran society is the sustained economic and social development of the country. At the same time, the reunification of Salvadoran society and an increased degree of social cohesion are indispensable for fostering development. Hence, the set of agreements required to put a definitive end to the armed conflict

in El Salvador must include certain minimum commitments to promote development for the benefit of all sectors of the population." (United Nations, 1995.)

The aims and scope of the peace accords thus were not limited to ending the war, but instead covered most areas of social and political life in the country, thereby laying the foundations for the construction of a new social reality. Quite apart from whether or not these commitments could be complied with or the level of political will of the parties, most Salvadorans clearly viewed the accords as an historic opportunity to construct a new country and a new society, not simply as a set of technical measures to end the armed conflict. The parties to the negotiation and virtually every sector of the Salvadoran elite underscored this notion.

In 1992, there was a generalized feeling that ending the war through the accords created an opportunity to rebuild the country, not only materially and economically but also socially, structurally, and culturally. This view was held by sectors focused on purely economic issues, who believed that there would no longer be any obstacle to the country's economic growth, and by those who believed that democratization could open the door to development with equity, peace, social justice, and respect for basic freedoms. Whatever their point of view, the majority of Salvadorans shared a sense of optimism over the future of the country.

Ten years later, that optimism has evaporated, and many citizens no longer view the future with the hope of a decade ago. Judging from survey results and from much of the information in press reports, the issue is not that Salvadorans are dissatisfied with the peace accords or that they expect to be as enthusiastic about the peace pact as they were ten years ago. Rather, they are less enthusiastic and hopeful about the future of the nation, the potential for a better quality of life and the social development of the country. In a sense, some Salvadorans are more disillusioned than ever, and more pessimistic about the national future than they were ten years ago.

To what can we attribute this widespread subjective state of the nation? Is it that the peace accords failed in their mission? Why are so many Salvadorans apparently more disillusioned with the situation in the country today than ever before? This article attempts to answer these questions based on findings from public opinion surveys. It traces the climate of public opinion beginning with the one that prevailed at the time that peace was achieved. The article is divided into four main sections. The

first examines the state of public opinion when the peace accords were signed; the second discusses the current state of Salvadoran social thought as expressed in opinion polls. The third section tracks the evolution of public opinion over the past ten years, and a final section offers some reflections about what occurred during this period to create the present disillusionment with democracy.

Expectations of the Peace Accords

Most Salvadorans supported and applauded the signing of the peace pact in 1992 because it formally and effectively ended a protracted and bloody civil conflict and because it represented an opportunity to rebuild a democratic society. From the public's standpoint, this meant a society that would bring about the long-awaited social and economic well-being so often deferred in the past. While many people were unfamiliar with specifics of the accord and had not even read the text, they were aware of its significance through the declarations of the negotiating parties and press reports. Therefore, while they lacked an in-depth understanding, citizens were not mistaken in their expectation that the accords would launch the construction of a new social as well as political order.

While peace made the physical reconstruction of the country possible, building a new society required building a new socio-political order. This required action in two pivotal areas: the establishment of democratic institutions and the construction of a more just society in socioeconomic terms. In the institutional arena, respect for human rights and civil liberties would be facilitated by dismantling the old repressive forces, redefining the role of the armed forces, and creating new institutions imbued with in the spirit of democracy. The socioeconomic arena saw the creation of the Forum for Economic and Social *Concertación* and measures to mitigate the social costs of structural adjustment programs as well as to address the agrarian problem. These measures were expressly aimed toward sustainable economic and social development of the country, a prerequisite for what the United Nations had called the "reunification of Salvadoran society, in democracy."

One way or another, citizens were aware of the complexity of the challenge presented by peace. A survey conducted by the University Institute of Public Opinion (*Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública* –

IUDOP) of the University of Central America (UCA) in late 1991 during the final stages of the negotiation process found that three out of ten Salvadorans thought that the negotiations should focus on the economic reforms required to solve the country's economic problems. At the same time, four out of ten Salvadorans thought that the dialogue should address issues relating to the armed conflict (the FMLN's transition to society, reduction and purging of the armed forces, and the cease-fire itself). This means that even before the accords were signed, a significant percentage of citizens viewed them as an opportunity to revisit the structural issues in the country, in addition to issues related to the conflict.

Table 1. Opinion on the most important issue to be resolved by the peace talks (October-November 1991)

"What is the most important issue that the dialogue must resolve?"

Issue	Percentage
Economic Reforms	30.0
FMLN transition to civil society	16.7
Reduction of the Armed Forces	13.5
Purging of the Armed Forces	10.2
Judicial Reform	4.7
Solve all the problems in the country	4.7
Achieve a cease-fire	2.7
Other responses	7.9
Don't know, no response	9.6

Source: IUDOP (1991)

The explanation for this data lies in peoples' perceptions of the causes of the civil war. In an IUDOP survey conducted immediately following the signing of the Chapultepec Accords, nearly 40 percent of those polled identified causes or explanations for the war that related to social injustice and the economic crisis, not just a thirst for power or the emergence of

the guerrillas *per se*. Moreover, a comparison of these responses with those obtained on the same subject in December 1988 (see IUDOP, 1992), shows that by the war's end, the number of citizens who believed that the main causes of the armed conflict had to do with structural and economic conditions in the country had grown. For example, in December 1988, slightly less then 30 percent of respondents gave reasons having to do with the situation in the country, and the single most frequently expressed opinion pointed to the quest for power by the opposing groups.

If when the accords were signed Salvadorans viewed them as a chance to redefine the country's socio-economic order rather than simply to stop the conflagration, it was not only because they knew that these issues were contained in the pact. It was because they believed that achieving peace entailed solving the war's underlying structural causes. Without a doubt, the end of the war itself—the opportunity to live in peace—constituted the greatest source of satisfaction with the peace accords: 42.7 percent of Salvadorans surveyed in January 1992 stated that the cease-fire was the most important point included in the agreements. Even so, in the same survey, slightly over 16 percent of citizens reported that, in their view, the economic-social accord was the most important part of the pact (IUDOP, 1992).

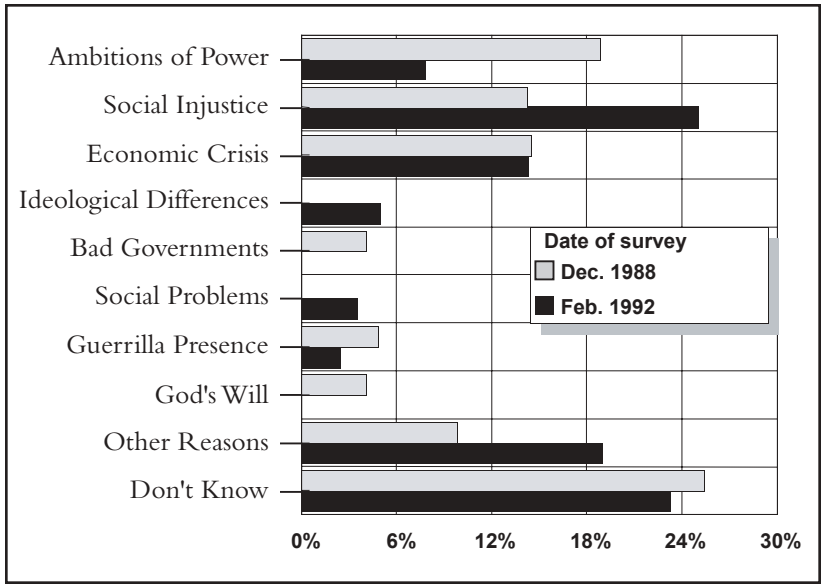
Thus, however citizens were queried about the peace accords, the issue of economic transformation in the country figured in their responses. Even when cited only by a minority, peace had to do with the economic situation and, to some extent, with social democracy. Political peace was not enough and the official text of the accords reflected this. And therein lay the relevance of the peace accords and the optimism and hope they inspired.

Indeed, an initial survey conducted just five months after the peace accords were signed found that nearly 70 percent of citizens believed that some things in the country or the situation overall were changing for the better. With certain exceptions, the accords were very well received by the majority of citizens and the commitments contained in the accords had a high degree of legitimacy. For example, over 53 percent favored the reduction and purging of the armed forces; 64 percent supported the dissolution of the security forces; and nearly 75 percent supported replacing them with a new National Civilian Police.

The optimism was such that overall views of the national economic situation changed radically between October 1991 and January-February 1992 (IUDOP, 1992; IUDOP, 1991). In late 1991, about 65 percent of

Figure 1. Opinion on the Cause of War

"In your opinion, what caused the war in El Salvador?"



Source: IUDOP (1992)

those surveyed felt that the national economy had worsened, while nearly 22 percent felt it was the same, and just 11.6 percent felt it had improved. Just three months later, immediately after the signing of the peace accord, just 30 percent of those polled felt that the country was in worse shape economically (less than half the percentage in the previous survey). Those who felt the situation had not changed had risen to 45 percent (the largest group), and those who felt that the situation had improved had grown to 25 percent (double the previous level). In just three short months, the perception of the economic situation in the country had become a great deal less pessimistic, a highly unusual shift in the history of Salvadoran public opinion (see Figure 4 below).

What happened during the months prior to the signing of the accords that led people to change their opinion of the economy? News reports from the end of that year reveal no unusual or extraordinary event, no pronouncement on economic policy, and no particular disbursement of

aid for the country. So why this spectacular shift? The only plausible explanation has to do with the advent of peace and the change in Salvadoran perceptions of the economic situation based on the prevailing climate of optimism. That is, expectations began to intercede in Salvadorans' vision of economic reality.

Public Opinion Ten Years Later

In 2002, the Salvadoran government—the third since peace was achieved—declared that the accords had been complied with. This view was not shared by the FMLN, which believes that compliance remains an unfinished task, particularly in the social and economic spheres and in the area of demobilization of ex-combatants.[2] Leaving aside the views of groups that signed the accords,[3] the prevailing climate in the country is not the same as that of ten years ago. This should come as no surprise given the events of the last decade. What should come as a surprise, however, is not just the lack of optimism, but also that public opinion polls reflect a social climate of deep pessimism and disillusionment over the situation in the country (see Maihold and Córdova Macías, 2001; Cruz, 2001). The palpable optimism shared by citizens ten years ago has all but disappeared.

A survey conducted in late 2001 to gauge opinion about the situation in the country and the peace accords found that three out of four citizens believed that the country needed a change, while only one in four believed it was on the right track. The trend in public opinion can be traced back to 1996. Nonetheless, its emergence in a survey ten years since the advent of peace suggests that citizens are not seeing the country they had expected.

Most revealing are data on opinions of the accords themselves. When asked whether the Chapultepec treaty had been good or bad, the vast majority—80 percent—reported that the accords had been good; only 6.6 percent held the opposing view that they had been bad, and nearly 13 percent hedged by saying that they were neither. The continued support for the accords says a lot about citizens' views of the process and their commitment to achieving peace. However, when citizens were asked to evaluate the national situation, using the moment that peace was achieved as a benchmark—their opinions are expressed differently. They diverge into two major groups: those who feel that the country is better off ten

years after achieving peace, and those who feel that El Salvador is in the same or worse shape than it was ten years ago (See Table 2).

Table 2. Opinion on the situation in the country ten years after the peace accords and the reasons for these opinions

"Please think of the country ten years ago, before the peace accords were signed. Based on what you know or have heard, how do you think the country is doing compared to ten years ago, better than before, the same as before, or worse than before. Why do you think this?"

The situation in the country is better	**53.9%**
There is no more war, there is peace	45.0
The economy has improved	10.4
There are more freedoms	9.1
There is tranquility	9.0
The country is better off	7.6
There has been a change to a democratic system	5.6
There is less crime	4.1
Respect for human rights	3.8
Other responses	4.3
Don't know	1.0
The situation in the country is the same	**14.6%**
There has been no change	41.3
There is violence and crime	34.5
The economy is the same	16.8
Corruption is the same	1.7
Other responses	5.3
Don't know	0.5
The situation in the country is worse	**30.9%**
Crime and violence are widespread	51.8
The economy is worse	33.8
Corruption is the same	3.3
Other responses	8.7
Don't know	0.2

Source: IUDOP (2002)

By December 2001, slightly more than half of Salvadorans believed that the situation in the country was better than when the peace accords were signed, while 14.6 percent felt that it was the same, and 31 percent believed that it was worse off. This means that, in contrast to their positive evaluation of the impact of the peace agreement *per se*, many Salvadorans had not observed significant, positive changes following implementation of the accords. Nearly half of its citizens felt that the country was now the same or worse than it was a decade ago.

Why this view of the situation in the country? An initial explanation that informs the analysis of the current climate of disillusionment can be found in the reasons that citizens themselves give for their opinions. (See Table 2). For example, most of those who stated that the country was better off now, felt that because peace had been achieved and the armed conflict had ended, the country was better off. Other respondents in this group cited various reasons that are less shared, but still significant: 10 percent mentioned the economic situation; 9.1 percent cited respect for freedoms; a similar percentage mentioned a state of tranquility in the country; slightly less than 8 percent simply said that the country was better; and just over 5 percent cited the change toward a democratic system, among other reasons. In short, the end of the war was the main reason given by most of those who responded that the country was better off. However, people who stated that the country was the same or worse offered very similar reasons for their opinion. The three primary reasons given for their view were the lack of substantial change in the country, levels of crime and violence, and an immobilized economy. And finally, those who cited a deterioration in the national situation after the accords most frequently were concerned about higher levels of violence (cited by over half of respondents with a pessimistic view). This was followed by reasons relating to economic problems (economic decline, unemployment, poverty, and inflation), and various other reasons that do not exceed 15 percent. In sum, the country is worse off now, according to some citizens, because there is more violence in the form of crime, and because the national economy has deteriorated in every way.

The December 2001 survey revealed that over half of citizens regarded the economic situation as the country's main problem, while nearly one third cited crime as a problem. This trend, as will be seen below, has not changed substantially since the accords were signed.

This means that if the country needs to change direction, as more than 70 percent of the population has indicated over the last five years, it is because many people believe that the country's root problems have not been solved to the desired extent, in that the accords have not necessarily translated into improved social conditions in the country. A significant segment of citizens feels that the country is better off because the war ended, but that it goes no farther than that. For others, however, the country is not better off because, despite the end of the war, violence continues to breed insecurity, and economic stability has not brought the promised benefits that most citizens expected.

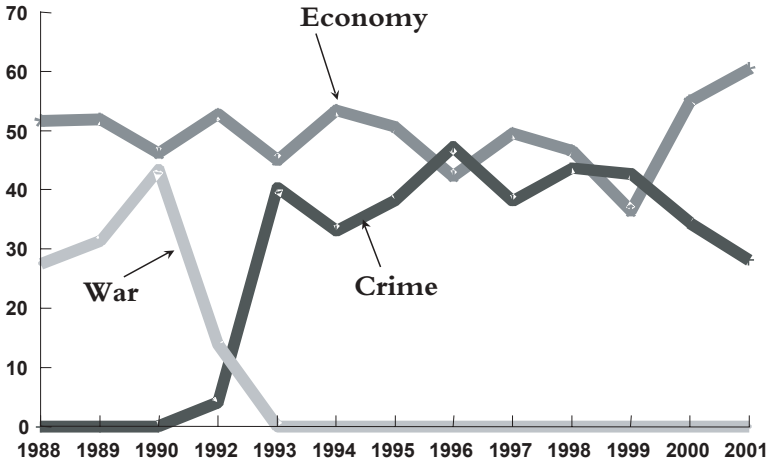
It is therefore no coincidence that the primary reasons underlying criticism of the current state of the country and the need for change are, simultaneously, the main problems facing the nation. Public opinion seems to be saying that if the country is not doing well, it is because of the failure to address these underlying problems.

The Evolution of Public Opinion Over Ten Years

The tenth anniversary of the signing of the peace accords took place in a climate of public consensus that violence and the economy constitute the most significant difficulties facing Salvadoran society today. Recognition of these problems, however, is not new or even recent. It is not the case that, after ten years, citizens suddenly discovered that crime and economic problems plague the country. These problems existed when the accords were signed (see Figure 2). At the end of 2001, then, Salvadorans were merely echoing the same longstanding concerns.

A look at Figure 2 may help clarify this. Prior to the Chapultepec Accord, the main problems cited by citizens were the economy (poverty, unemployment, inflation, economic injustice, etc.) and the war—usually in the form of political violence. The accords had the immediate effect of ending the war; public concern over the war and political violence disappeared outright beginning in 1993. Nonetheless, even as the war receded from people's minds, it was replaced immediately by anxiety over another brand of violence: crime. Since 1993, crime has been vying for space in the public debate with the other principal national problem that, judging from public opinion, could not be resolved by peace: the economy. Since 1993, the economy and crime have taken turns dominating national public

Figure 2. The Main Problems Since 1988, According to Salvadoran Public Opinion



Source: Prepared by author based on IUDOP reports.

debate in a somber interchange: Salvadorans are preoccupied with one or the other problem, and there is no room for anything else.[4]

According to the data, economic issues have been the predominant public concern, so much so that, by the end of the decade, the economy would seem to have established itself as the national problem most frequently noted by Salvadorans. On the tenth anniversary of the accords, survey findings show that Salvadorans are more concerned than ever about the economy, including if compared with opinions during the war. Not only did peace fail to bring economic prosperity, it also became the backdrop for a deteriorating economic situation. Moreover, while political violence disappeared with the signing of the peace accords, it was immediately replaced by criminal or social violence, which appears to have had the same impact on citizens: a feeling of insecurity, and threatened physical integrity and survival. As a result, many Salvadorans ended up feeling that despite the war's end, they were just as insecure, if not more so, than they were during the worst years of the armed conflict.[5] The end of the war failed to bring about the long-desired tranquility.

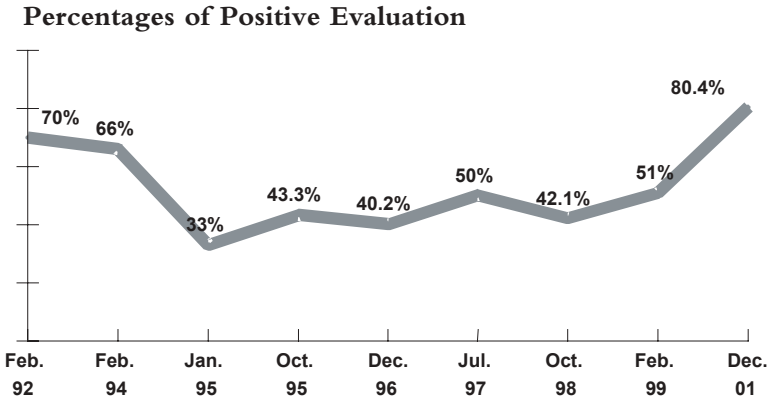
This is the context for opinions about the situation in the country with regards to the peace accords, which helps explain the prevailing climate of socio-political disillusionment among most Salvadoran citizens.

We have already seen that the vast majority of citizens view the peace pact as good in and of itself, regardless of the prevailing situation in the country. Opinions diverge, however, when it comes to assessing the situation in function of the accords. It is worth noting that the December 2001 evaluation of the peace accords is the most positive to date, even if it lacks the euphoria of ten years ago. Figure 3 shows a positive trend in public opinion regarding the accords. As can be observed, the view of the accords has not been consistent over time. The trends show that the overwhelming support of the first two years gave way to a crisis of disapproval and apathy. By 1995—just three years after they were signed—only one third of Salvadorans had a positive opinion of the accords. Since then, public opinion gradually has improved, fluctuating between 40 and 50 percent over the years, before reaching its current, unprecedented approval rate (80 percent) which, beneath the surface, is totally devoid of enthusiasm. This is to say that the peace pact's current approval levels differ qualitatively from the approval levels expressed by a population satisfied and basking in the glow of the war's end. By the end of 2001, citizens concurred more than ever that the peace pact was positive. Nonetheless, it is quite likely that this is only possible because they have relinquished any expectations above and beyond the achievement of ending the war. This is the only way to explain the inconsistency between the current opinion of the accords and that of the country that has emerged as a result.

These are the expectations that long dominated the public view of the peace accords. As previously noted, when the peace pact was signed people rightly viewed it as an opportunity to build a new society. In addition to the cease-fire, the agreement encompassed issues from political liberties to economic development with equity. Translated into public expectations, this meant, if not economic prosperity, at least the implementation of measures that created conditions for equal opportunity. In a more concrete sense, expectations revolved around poverty reduction, job creation for the majorities, controlling the cost of living, and social compensation programs for the neediest. One can agree or disagree with the validity of these expectations, but the fact remains that many citizens understood the treaty's potential in this way, and harbored these expectations to varying degrees.[6]

Figure 3. Positive Opinion of the Peace Accord, Measured on Different Dates

Based on positive responses to two questions: "Do you think that the peace accords have had more successes or more failures?" and "Do you think that the peace accords have been good or bad for the country?"



Source: Developed by the author based on IUDOP reports.

In January 1995, when President Calderón Sol announced a new package of economic measures, including potential increases in the Value Added Tax [*Impuesto al Valor Agregado* (IVA)] and the decision to proceed with the privatization of state-owned enterprises, he entered into a sensitive area of political decisions that most citizens felt took a different course than they had expected. The news of an IVA increase, expanded privatization policies, and a scaled down government through job elimination, was precisely what many Salvadorans did not want to hear in the economic sphere. The sense that spread through broad sectors of the population was not only that the government was not doing what it had promised or what was expected in the economic sphere; worse yet, it was doing just the opposite.

Most citizens, who already had criticized the previous administration's economic orientation, viewed the new measures as a negation of the

social and economic objectives set forth in the peace accords. In addition to criticizing the government, these people decided that the peace pact had produced more failures than successes.

In fact, the abrupt and unanticipated decline in positive opinions of the accords coincided with the announcement of the new economic package. A significant segment of public opinion saw the potential for building a different kind of society begin to recede. For example, a survey of citizens' views on the economic package presented by the second ARENA administration showed that nearly 62 percent of Salvadorans believed that it would only benefit the richest sectors of the country (IUDOP, 1995).[7] For most Salvadorans then, the measures advocated by the Calderón government were more of the same—more of the past than of the long-awaited future.

The optimistic view of the economic situation in the country, the view that had changed so dramatically due solely to the announcement and signing of the peace pact, gradually returned to levels registered prior to the signing of the pact in Mexico. As shown in Figure 4, at the end of 1996, the percentage of people who believed that the situation in the country had deteriorated was much higher than the percentage registered before January 16, 1992. According to survey data, never before had citizens concurred so strongly that the country had deteriorated economically. The first four years following the signing of the accords showed a consistent increase in pessimism on this issue, which peaked just before the municipal and legislative elections of 1997. Interestingly, during that year, trends in public opinion concerning the national economy reversed and the prevailing opinion became, not that the economy was improving, but that it was unchanged.

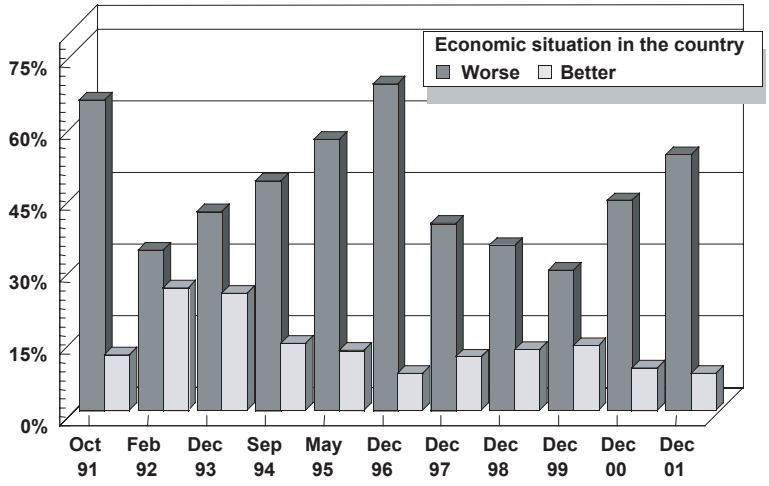
How to attribute the drastic change in the pessimistic outlook on the country's economy? There are two possible explanations. The first is that such a negative view already had reached its peak (slightly more than 60 percent). In other words, it had little room left to grow considering that there were other sectors of the population that held to their relatively more optimistic viewpoints. What happened, then, was that many people who had reported that the economy was deteriorating began to report that it had not changed (note that the percentage of people who felt that the economy was improving did not change significantly). It is not that these people had seen improvement, but rather that they no longer observed the same pace of economic deterioration. A second explanation

focuses on the elections as a potential catalyst of public expectations. It should be recalled that the main opposition party in those elections was the FMLN. And for the first time, it received enough votes to become a political force inside the assembly capable of counteracting, at least in theory, the weight of the executive branch in national decisions. Although the specific influence the elections may have had on public opinion is not clear, it may be that the message citizens heard was that it was possible to stop certain central government policies, and that this contributed to the relative decrease in pessimistic views expressed by many citizens.

The first decade of peace drew to a close with a renewed pessimistic trend in economic opinion. In December 2001, Salvadorans once again were inclined to note the economic deterioration in the country. This is completely consistent with the predominance of the economic problem in public opinion. (See Figure 2, above).

Figure 4. Opinions of the Economic Situation of the Country Since 1991

"In your opinion, this year has the economic situation in the country improved, worsened, or remained unchanged?"



Source: Prepared by author based on IUDOP reports.

The economic issue is not the only one impacting Salvadorans' evaluation of the overall situation in the country ten years after the peace accords. The other part of the story reflected in public opinion is the other major unresolved national problem: criminality.

As described earlier, concerns over crime and social violence emerged hand in glove with peace, taking the war's place as one of the national challenges. The crime problem was identified immediately following the signing of the peace accords, and for many years the postwar period was associated directly with criminal violence. In a survey conducted in February 1993, one year after the signing of the accords, nearly nine out of ten citizens stated that crime had risen in the preceding year. In other words, the identification of crime as a new challenge was virtually unanimous. Many citizens began to think that crime constituted the greatest failure of the accords, an inherent negation of the pact's primary goal of bringing peace and tranquility to Salvadoran society. While it is true that the war and politically motivated violence ended, the eruption of criminality in society kept Salvadorans from experiencing the security they had hoped for.

Table 3. Opinion that crime is rising

"In your opinion, compared to last year, has crime increased, remained the same, or decreased?"

Survey Year	Percentage who feel that crime has increased
1993	88.6
1996	85.0
1997	63.4
1998	66.0
1999	52.3
2000	52.9
2001	42.3

Source: Prepared by author based on IUDOP reports.

Only after the announcement of Calderón Sol's economic policy did the economic issue clearly emerge as a fiasco for the transformative aspirations of the peace accords. By contrast, the crime issue was an obstacle to the experience of peace from the outset. The war in the mountains shifted to the streets and political violence metamorphosed into social violence.

The public view of the magnitude of the problem, however, has varied throughout the decade. Initial consultations reflected a generalized opinion that criminal violence was on the rise. Over time, and with more distance from the signing of the accords, citizens clearly no longer observed violence increasing at the same rate. This is consistent with victimization levels reported by these same citizens (see McElhinny and Cruz, 2002). Nonetheless, crime-induced feelings of insecurity have been entrenched in Salvadoran lifestyles and have permeated social relationships and the relationship between citizens and the government. Many believe that the objective of peace was only reached in political terms and that the war has shifted to the social arena, thereby making it impossible to experience any kind of genuine peace and tranquility. Under these circumstances, many Salvadorans not only are frustrated over the potential of the peace accords, but also have come to question the effectiveness and legitimacy of the supposed new order the accords ushered in.

To be more specific, Salvadorans have begun to question whether the democratic society that the accords attempted to build is really useful for living in peace and tranquility. They wonder whether, under certain circumstances, a societal model in which an authoritarian leadership imposes the prevailing order might not be more effective.

Current Disillusionment with the Accords

Ten years after the end of the war, public opinion of the peace accords probably is more circumspect and less colored by the soaring expectations of early in the decade. This is not to say that people's view of the current situation is not influenced by the hopes they had harbored regarding the transition made possible by the peace pact. For most Salvadorans, the importance of the peace agreement resided in its potential to change the social situation of the country. Translated into concrete actions, this meant solving the fundamental problems in the country, problems that precluded a life with dignity. Ten years after the

accords, Salvadorans are still making virtually the same demands of incoming governments (see Table 4).

In May 1999, just as the third ARENA administration took office, the main difference regarding public demands of the incoming government was that those surveyed demanded fighting crime, a concern that was non-existent before the war. Demands such as the eradication of poverty and job creation continued to figure in public opinion in varying degrees; the only issue that had disappeared was the need to deal with the economic crisis. Apart from this one issue, Salvadorans demanded the same of President Francisco Flores as they had of the Cristiani government: more security, elimination of poverty, and more jobs. It is probably the case that these types of demands will always be made of a new government; to be sure, the demand for poverty reduction, in a country where half of the population lives in poverty, is not going to disappear overnight. The fact is, however,

Table 4. Opinions over time about what the next government should do (in percentages)

Problems to be addressed by next government	Date of survey: Nov 88	Feb 94	May 99
Eradicate poverty	30.2	9.9	20.7
End the war, political violence	27.1	5.0	0.0
Fight crime	0.0	15.7	44.7
Deal with the economic crisis	12.8	14.6	0.0
Create jobs	8.9	37.4	12.3
Improve public services	5.2	7.8	0.0
Strengthen democracy	3.1	2.0	—
Improve the situation in the country	0.0	6.7	1.3
Keep promises made	—	0.0	5.5
Other responses	5.0	1.3	8.4
Don't know	7.7	1.6	7.1

Source: Prepared by the author based on IUDOP reports.

that many people expected this from the peace accords and ten years later it has become evident that very little has been done in this regard.

Because of the accords' failure to usher in a period of peace and tranquility, economic prosperity and more equitable development, significant sectors of the population reached the conclusion that the country had not changed enough to be able to talk of a new society. Under these circumstances, the political system came to be seen as inefficient and nonfunctional, and interest in political participation gradually dissolved.

Citizens began to feel not only that they should not expect much of the peace accords, neither should they expect much of a political order—new or not—that was incapable of meeting the population's longstanding needs. From the economic standpoint, Salvadorans realized that the new system had no intention of changing how economic prosperity was understood, that instead it was seeking legitimacy and stability to further structural adjustment programs, an approach diametrically opposed to their interests and expectations. To the extent that the new order was incapable of guarding against crime-induced insecurity, citizens began to dissociate themselves from that order. This helps explain the level of institutional distrust in the country, the growing public detachment from political life, including electoral and party politics and, most importantly, the gradual rejection of democracy as the preferred political system (Maihold and Córdova Macías, 2001; Cruz, 2001; UNDP, 2001).

Three aspects of institutional trust illustrate the situation described above. First, confidence in government institutions erodes ever more with the passage of time. The UNDP Human Development Report 2001 describes how public confidence in national institutions declined over the five preceding years. Second, this distrust is even more pronounced in institutions most emblematic of government and politics: political parties, the Legislative Assembly, the Supreme Court of Justice, and the executive branch.[8] And third, despite seemingly clean and free elections, public confidence in electoral processes has not changed significantly and, in fact, has gradually declined. The percentage of people with a high degree of confidence in elections dropped from 26 percent in the 1994 general elections to 16 percent in 2000.

Growing abstention from electoral participation since 1994 is the clearest indicator of public withdrawal from political participation. In the last presidential, legislative and municipal elections, the best estimates

indicate that no more than 34 percent of the population went to the polls (Cruz, 2001).[9] This is particularly telling since several studies (Córdova, 2000; Seligson et al, 2000; Cruz, 1998) show that the main reasons for abstentionism are not technical in nature. Yet another indicator of public detachment from politics is the low level of civic involvement in organizations, with the exception of religious groups. Very few Salvadorans currently are involved in labor unions, political parties, community associations, service clubs, or even social movements. Most people, if they are involved in anything, are active in religious groups whose characteristics do not necessarily include democratic civic consciousness.

Indicators reflecting the difficulty of fostering values associated with a democratic political culture are inconclusive due to the absence of studies on this issue in the past. The University of Pittsburgh's series of studies on political culture shows progress in tolerant attitudes and widespread support of the system from 1991 to 1999 (see Seligson et al, 2000). At the same time, however, IUDOP's series of surveys found that such attitudes do not necessarily extend to the entire population and that most citizens probably have conflicting or mixed emotions about democracy (see IUDOP, 1998). Moreover, studies consistently show a decreasing preference for a democratic system over other types of political regimes, together with growing public indifference about the type of system that should be established in El Salvador. In a recent report, Latinobarómetro (2001), a polling firm that compares Latin Americans' political attitudes, described a significant drop in satisfaction with democracy in El Salvador and several other Latin American countries.

These indicators suggest that such problems are not unique to El Salvador. To varying degrees, most countries, including those with longstanding democratic traditions such as Costa Rica, are facing similar crises of political credibility, alienation from politics, and the decreasing likelihood that younger generations will have a comparable level of commitment to democracy. Thus, it could be argued that the Salvadoran crisis is within normal trends observed in other democracies. But what would distinguish El Salvador from other countries is that the crisis in attitudes has not occurred in a context of longstanding democratic stability. To the contrary, it has emerged in the context of a new political order that in theory would facilitate the types of changes that the population has been demanding for years. El Salvador, in fact, can be distinguished from other

countries, including places like Nicaragua and South Africa, where the transition immediately translated into high levels of political and electoral participation. In El Salvador, disillusionment with politics—and with democracy—has occurred in a moment of hope.

From the standpoint of classical political systems theory (Easton, 1992), all of this means that, in the people's view, the new political order that grew out of the peace accords has been incapable of processing the population's most basic needs. That political order has been unable to articulate integrative responses for the majorities, primarily the most impoverished and dispossessed. Virtually all the indicators of disillusionment described earlier—lack of confidence in institutions, abstention from electoral events, attitudes contrary to the democratic spirit—are encountered more frequently among traditionally more marginalized citizens in urgent need of effective responses to their plight. But due to their own social fragmentation, as well as the failure to extend the freedoms and political spaces that were won to sectors other than the elites who negotiated them, most Salvadorans have been unable to translate their longstanding needs and grievances into actual demands. As a result, the political system has not felt pressured to respond, and Salvadorans, in turn, have not felt connected to the system. Instead, they have done everything possible to ensure that the system's reactions and outputs—directed towards those traditionally in a position to exert pressure (the economic elites)—do not continue to exert a counterproductive influence on them. The logical consequence, then, has been flight, literal and figurative, and social indifference. And this explains the impulse to escape: migration abroad, religious experience, youth gangs, etc. These constitute parallel systems that do have the capacity to respond to people's needs, albeit in distorted ways at times (consider, for example, organized crime).

All of this clearly has an impact on the legitimacy of the system that emerged from the accords. As Lipset (1996) would say, there comes a time when people realize that the system is incapable of helping them; they reach a point at which they begin to ask themselves whether it is worthwhile to keep supporting that system. This is particularly critical in cases such as El Salvador where the new order is trying to demonstrate its ability to contend with the country's problems. In such cases, a crisis of effectiveness and legitimacy may lead to a new rupture, when

the support generated by the simple fear of returning to the previous regime runs out.[10] Thus, it should come as no surprise that, when asked how they evaluate the current political system compared to that of ten years ago, most citizens give the former system a higher rating. (Cruz, 2001). It is not that all Salvadorans are willing to go backwards and embrace the regimes of the past. But there is a discernible trend among the poorest and most socially and economically deprived sectors, who would willingly discard some of the accords' achievements in the realm of political liberties in exchange for some response to their shared existential needs.

Although the current political system has not reached a point of no return, it is clear that the country is moving closer and closer to such a crisis. This will be true as long as the gap between political elites and citizens—the *demos*, as Artiga González (2002) would say—becomes ever wider. Nonetheless, a crisis will not actually erupt as long as the system is able to respond to the demands of those who traditionally have benefited from it, and as long as there are escape valves for the majorities whom the system fails. But there is no doubt that, over time, more and more people—including some elites—will join the ranks of the politically excluded and come to share in their perceptions and disappointments, even as mechanisms for escape become fewer and fewer.

Judging from what Salvadorans themselves have to say ten years after the signing of the peace accords, El Salvador is not living in peace despite the end of the war and some progress in the fight against crime. Social and economic equity has not improved despite—or, in fact, because of—structural adjustment programs. And reunification has not taken place despite the rhetoric about a new country. Instead, in some ways Salvadoran society is more fragmented now than before.

Turning a blind eye to these issues will not lead to an optimistic future. Rather, it will result in the impossibility of keeping alive the dream that Salvadorans once had of a democratic, peaceful, and just society.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Wilson Center conference. It was also published in Spanish as "Los acuerdos de paz diez años después. Una mirada desde los ciudadanos," *Estudios Centroamericanos (ECA),* No. 641-42, marzo-abril 2002, pp. 235-51.

2. Based on statements by Salvador Sánchez Cerén, Coordinator General of the FMLN, in an interview with a news radio station in the country.

3. It should be noted here that there are divergent opinions on compliance with the accords among signatories to the peace accords from the same side.

4. It should be pointed out, however, that views of the economic problem are much more complex than the crime problem. When citizens refer to the economy, they cite poverty, unemployment, inflation, or socio-economic injustice, and in more general terms, the economic crisis.

5. Statements by some citizens interviewed in the street are very revealing in this regard. They view the situation as worse than during the war, for the simple reason that during the war, political violence could be avoided as long as the citizen did not get involved in politics, while in the post-war period, criminal violence is impossible to prevent, since it can affect anyone regardless of ideological views or social background.

6. While it may be that the accord was not very specific on economic and social issues, it did contemplate addressing these issues. The understanding was that failure to do so would undermine the effort to ensure a firm and lasting peace in a country with as many profound economic inequalities as El Salvador.

7. Four years before, in 1991, when President Alfredo Cristiani announced the privatization policy, a survey showed that 47 percent of citizens believed that it would only benefit the richest sectors (IUDOP, 1991). With regard to the new economic package proposed by Calderón Sol, Salvadorans were even more convinced that privatization would not be to their benefit.

8. In fact, the IUDOP survey conducted along with the evaluation of the peace accords showed that these institutions, together with the Attorney General's Office, were considered the least trustworthy in the country.

9. This estimate of electoral participation compares the number of votes registered to the estimated number of eligible voters.

10. This is the concept of legitimacy by default suggested by Linz and Stepan (1996).

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TERRY KARL

The central question I want to address is: What is being constructed in El Salvador? Is it what I have elsewhere labeled a "hybrid regime?"[1] Is it a *democradura*, that is, a "hard" democracy, or a *dictablanda,* a form of "soft" authoritarian rule?[2] Is it, perhaps, a full-blown, consolidated democracy?

How do we characterize the nature of the Salvadoran transition?

The type of transition matters a great deal. This may seem obvious to many people, but it goes against the arguments of some who claim that the type of transition from authoritarian rule has no lasting effects. Some scholars have maintained that it doesn't matter how countries "transition" to another regime type because, after 10 or 15 years, the results tend to be similar. I do not believe this is correct; El Salvador illustrates why.

El Salvador, in my view, is a "war transition." This term is intended to convey the idea that El Salvador was actually experiencing *two* simultaneous transitions.[3] One transition involved the breakdown of an old form of authoritarian rule and the construction of "something else," characterized at the very least as a form of electoralism, if not democracy.[4] The second was a transition from war to peace. The key is that those transitions were completely inter-related, the transition from war to peace was brought about and made possible by the demise of El Salvador's long history of military-dominated authoritarian rule.

The fact of the war transition leads us to the issues on the table, and it especially helps us to understand some of the public opinion data presented by Miguel Cruz.

First, the absolute concentration on the dismantling of a repressive security apparatus, which was the overriding focus of the peace agreements, had both positive and negative consequences. The emphasis on dismantling repressive forces and demilitarizing the country removed some of the key bastions of authoritarian rule, but it left a key problem of sequencing in El Salvador (and in other countries that experienced "war transitions.") Because the resolution of the civil war required the reduction of the armed forces, the transformation of the police, etc., and because this occurred in the context of a ruined economy, easy

access to arms, and a habit of violence, the ability of the new regime to sustain order was compromised. It was unable to successfully incorporate the numbers of people who had no other skills except those related to being armed.

This problem of order characterizes all war transitions. Once armed forces on both sides are dismantled, the country confronts all kinds of armed bands and common crime that are not based on ideology.[5] In El Salvador, I remember interviewing a small group of armed men who made their living robbing people near the Honduran border. Half of them were ex-police and the other half were ex-guerrillas. There was no ideology involved; these were all people who had no way to incorporate themselves into a declining economy, no way to use any skills except their skills with arms.

This is an absolutely central problem in the context of a war transition, and it is one that has not been solved. On the one hand, if repressive forces are not dismantled, there is no peace agreement. On the other hand, if they are dismantled prior to devising any way to incorporate people into another form of activity or employment, the result is clear: political violence becomes social violence. This is why levels of violence in El Salvador are so extraordinarily high.

This is not a new problem. If one looks, for example, at the demobilization efforts in the South of the United States after the Civil War, what one finds are the same high levels of social violence, the same problem of people using guns as a way of earning a livelihood. We simply do not know what to do about the sequencing problem, which arises over and over.

A second key issue in the democratization process —the problem of political parties—is also related to the specific kind of war transition that took place in El Salvador. Rubén Zamora mentioned the issue of parties, but I want to approach it in a slightly different way.

Because virtually everyone in El Salvador, from about 1988 to 1990, was focused on the problem of peace, it was literally impossible to get political leaders to concentrate on the nature of a future political party system. It was extremely difficult to foster a discussion regarding political party or electoral rules, or what an electoral tribunal should look like. What should the barriers to party entry be like? Should smaller parties participate? These questions seemed unimportant—at least to the left—when the central issue was trying to resolve the war.

The left, not only in El Salvador but in many other places, did not make discussions of democratic rules a priority during the Cold War. Indeed, it tended to assume that issues of social justice, human rights, land reform, and the like were more important. Thus, the actual nitty-gritty of and mechanisms for making a party system work were not given priority. But, as we know, the devil is in the details. Part of the war transition problem in El Salvador, then, is that there was not enough contestation and discussion of these issues in a broader sense. Questions of electoral reform, of the nature of the electoral tribunal, have been marked by the absence of such a discussion.

The unfamiliarity with electoral rules, paradoxically, was not as much of a problem for the authoritarian right. Because the project of the United States in El Salvador at the time was electoralist, and began with the insistence by the United States that elections take place as early as 1982, the right had to grapple with these questions earlier. The emphasis on elections was linked to U.S. aid to pursue the war, and notwithstanding the right's initial reluctance, elections became the name of the game.

What happened, ironically, was that the Salvadoran right, the ARENA party in particular, was able to modernize and transform itself into a political party ahead of the left. This was very important in terms of sequencing. There was a much greater effort by the right to form a modern party that would work in El Salvador because pursuit of the war in El Salvador depended on forming such a party and playing by different rules. This option was not available to the left, however, during the period of repression.

Thus, the right was far ahead of the left in party-building, including the conducting of campaigns and the modernization of the party apparatus. Together with the benefits of incumbency, this resulted in a significant political advantage. It did not have to happen this way, however. Some of the people on the right were unusually visionary in their understanding that democracy could be turned to their advantage, especially if they succeeded in constructing a modern political party with the backing of the United States.

For the left, the problem of sequencing arose not only because it was not able to participate or form parties at the same time that the right did, but also because the parties of the left continued longer on a war footing. Many of the struggles and divisions within the FMLN, for example, can be traced back to issues of the pursuit of the war and of the way the opposition formed in El Salvador, even prior to the war.

The type of war transition has very much shaped the nature of political parties in El Salvador, their different advantages and problems. Understanding the relationship between the war and party formation helps explain some of the extraordinary support ARENA enjoyed at the beginning of this process, as well its decline as the party has exercised power. But this same relationship also may help to explain the low opinion of political parties held by the public.

This low opinion is not unique to El Salvador, although the route that produced these attitudes is different. All over the world, including in the developed world and Latin America, when people are asked about what they think about political parties, they register a very low level of support. Parties and Congress are at the bottom of every single survey, and the Catholic Church and the army are at the top. This is true for every Latin American country except Costa Rica and Uruguay. El Salvador is not alone in this regard.

But the low opinion of parties has not translated into a low opinion of democracy, which is still understood as a conquest wrested from reluctant and repressive authoritarians. This is one of the key explanations for a unique set of paradoxes. In El Salvador, comparatively speaking, there is a fairly high level of support for democracy, among the highest in Latin America. The support may not be as high as in Uruguay or Costa Rica, but it is much higher than in places like Brazil, Paraguay, Venezuela, or Colombia.

The first paradox is that Salvadorans constantly rank the cleanliness and fairness of their elections as high when compared to other Latin American countries. But, at the same time, El Salvador also ranks extremely high in the number of people who abstain from elections. Clean elections, no voters. This might be explained by the extraordinarily low opinion of political parties, and the fact that political parties are not seen as efficacious. Indeed, it does not seem to matter to the average Salvadoran who rules at the national level, although it does seem to matter a great deal who rules at the municipal level. This may be why some of the most interesting and lively things about Salvadoran democracy are taking place not at the national but at the municipal level.

At the municipal level, for example, Salvadorans are willing to pay their taxes, because they believe that the municipality should have more resources to spend than the national government. The willingness to pay

taxes is based on the belief that their municipal level services have gotten better. This is a very interesting development that has not been replicated at the national level.

A second paradox in this war transition is related to the problem of inequality and democracy. Latin America is the most unequal region in the world by far. And El Salvador is one of the more unequal countries in Latin America. This means that we need to think about the relationship between constructing democracy and the type of inequality that characterizes this country.

We know that democracies are much less likely to survive when inequalities are not only high, but increasing. When inequalities are high and decreasing, the ability of democracy to sustain itself is much greater. In El Salvador, the period of trying to build democracy coincides with high (and increasing) inequalities. This is true across Latin America, but in El Salvador these problems are complicated by two additional factors: the need for post-war reconstruction as well as the especially recent (and continuing) rural origins of these inequalities.

This latter is especially important. As the data presented by Miguel Cruz indicates, opinion surveys reflect highly class-based, and especially rural, perceptions. What emerges in El Salvador is not evident in most other democracies (and this is the crux of the second paradox): the higher the income and educational level, the more people prefer authoritarian rule. In other countries, the correlation is usually the opposite, in that the greater support for authoritarian rule is found among people with lower levels of income and education.

Why is this important? If one assumes that democracies have difficulties taking root in a context of rapidly increasing inequalities, and if one thinks that inequalities need to be reduced over time for democracies to be consolidated, then it becomes very important to convince the affluent that the reduction of inequality is in their interest. They need to believe that their quality of life will be enhanced (through the reduction of crime and conflict, for example) if inequalities are reduced. This will require more social expenditure and more taxes, which in turn requires taxing the affluent. This has proved to be an especially intractable problem throughout Latin America, and especially in Central America (except Costa Rica).

If that is to happen, there has to be a process of compromise and discussion to convince those who have money to pay more. There have to be

agreements about the appropriate targeting of social expenditures as well. And finally, there have to be political parties that stand for this platform., that are committed to the reduction of poverty and inequality. The rationale is that not only will societies be more equitable, they will also be much less violent. The argument is based on the idea that the quality of life will be better for everybody if, in fact, greater equity is achieved.

Why has this not occurred in El Salvador? One explanation rests on the nature of class-based attitudes, in which the wealthiest would rather have a *mano dura* kind of political solution. An even more compelling explanation has to do with something that Miguel Cruz also mentioned: the ability to exit the country.

This ability to emigrate is absolutely essential to understanding what is happening in El Salvador. Albert O. Hirschman, the noted economist, wrote a wonderful book entitled *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. To paraphrase his idea, an individual has three options inside a polity: one can be loyal to the regime; one can raise his or her voice and say, "I want to change the regime;" or one can leave. Many in El Salvador have opted to leave, something that has been very important in shaping the country and the kinds of issues we are exploring today.

The ability to exit has had a real cost for El Salvador, in that the most entrepreneurial among all groups, rich and poor, leave the country. These groups, therefore, are not as much involved in the reshaping of the country, in insisting that political parties be more representative, and in forging the kinds of social pacts, built on increased taxation and more equitable expenditures, that would set the country on a path of slowly reducing inequalities. Furthermore, while the remittances they loyally send help to keep the economy afloat, these monies return to El Salvador in individual and not social ways, making the construction of schools, health clinics and the like more difficult. Thus the human development upon which meaningful democracy rests continues to be put off into the future.

Notes

1. See Terry Lynn Karl, "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," *Journal of Demcoracy,* Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1995, 72-86.

2. This terminology is from Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Demcoracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

3. See Terry Lynn Karl, Vincent Maphai and Rubén Zamora, "War Transitions: Ending Armed Conflict and Starting Democracy in `Uncivil' Societies," unpublished proposal, 1996. The same term is used by Karl and Zamora in a forthcoming work. See also Charles Call, "War Transitions and the New Civilian Security in Latin America**,"** *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 35, No. 1 (October 2002), pp. 1-20.

4. By "electoralist," I mean that elections were central to the phenomenon of change in El Salvador, but other key elements of democracy were lacking. See Terry Lynn Karl, "Electoralism: Why Elections are not Democracy," in Richard Rose (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Books, 2000).

5. See Call, cited above.