THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF DISASTER AND FOREIGN AID: NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN HONDURAS AFTER HURRICANE MITCH

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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by

Vilma Elisa Fuentes
This dissertation is dedicated to all those Hondurans who struggle to promote the development of their country.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work presented here would not have been possible without the support of several institutions and individuals. I thank the Institute for the Study of World Politics, the University of Florida’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and this same institution’s Graduate Minority Office for funding this project. Their generous financial support enabled me to conduct approximately a year of field research in Honduras and begin writing several chapters of this dissertation.

I am grateful to my committee members for the guidance and support they offered me throughout the different phases of this work. Dr. Leslie Anderson and Dr. Philip Williams shared with me their vast knowledge of Central America, democratization and peasant politics during my first few years in the Political Science doctoral program. They unwittingly convinced me that I should undertake doctoral research related to these issues. Dr. Goran Hyden helped me develop the theoretical framework for this dissertation. His books, graduate classes and experiences in the development field encouraged me to grapple with the concept of governance and appreciate how foreign donors and non-government organizations can influence this process. Dr. Oliver-Smith’s early enthusiasm for and interest in my topic convinced me that a political analysis of Hurricane Mitch’s impact could make a valuable contribution to the existing literature on disasters. All of these advisors took a fairly open-minded approach to my study. Rather than demand that I present a rigid research design, they suggested that I approach my subject matter with some flexibility. Post-disaster situations were so dynamic and
Honduran politics so poorly understood, they argued, that I had to just “get my feet on the ground” and be willing to change my theories and study design to better understand political reality. This I did and my research is significantly stronger for it. Dr. Renée Johnson kindly agreed to join my dissertation committee after I returned from Honduras. She helped me interpret my quantitative data and make sense of what thousands of Hondurans had told me. The work presented here is methodologically sounder as a result of her guidance. She together with the rest of my committee patiently read numerous drafts of my dissertation and guided my thinking throughout. This work is as much an ideological product of them as it is of me.

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Dennis Cubero also facilitated much of my work in Tegucigalpa. He introduced me to many of his colleagues in the National Congress, helped me obtain interviews with key government officials and granted me valuable lists describing the organization and composition of different political bodies. Dennis Cubero also gave me invaluable support with my research in Northern Honduras. He and his wife, Reyna Arias, introduced me to various people and places in the department of Cortés that had been devastated by Hurricane Mitch. This gave me a good general view of how this part of the
country had been affected by the disaster and eventually enabled me to select Potrerillos as one of my municipal research sites. Dennis and Reyna also welcomed me into their home, allowed me to convert parts of it into my private office and, when possible, offered me the use their vehicle. Their two teenage children often accompanied me in my mini-excursions around San Pedro Sula and helped me carry out tedious office tasks. We fought, laughed and enjoyed life as siblings often do. They will always have a special place in my heart.

The Municipal government of Potrerillos gave me unlimited support in my study of its region. It helped me determine the household population of Potrerillos, find and train research assistants, discover the socio-political history of its municipality and better understand how citizens there responded to the impact of disaster. The staff at Potrerillos’ Centro de Salud also generously offered their time and labor.

The Asociación de Organizaciones No-Gubernamentales de Honduras (ASONOG) provided logistical support for the research I conducted in San Marcos and Dolores Merendón, Ocotepeque. They not only transported me to these locations on numerous occasions but also helped me find reliable research assistants there. They together with the Consejo Departamental de Ocotepeque (CODEPO) also allowed me to use their office equipment to facilitate my research. Efraín Deras, the regional director of ASONOG in Ocotepeque, deserves particular thanks. He offered me the use of his personal vehicle whenever those belonging to ASONOG were unavailable, gave me countless hours of advice and support and introduced me to his family who lovingly received me into their home. Juan Manuel Espinoza and his family also were extremely
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I especially thank my family for their unending support and encouragement. My mother motivated me to pursue my doctoral degree and continually urged me to complete my dissertation. She was my main source of counsel during difficult and trying times. I doubt whether anybody has believed in me more than her or whether anybody deserves more credit for my academic achievements than she. My maternal grandmother prepared me for my research in Potrerillos and Honduras, more generally, by sharing with me her vast knowledge of these areas. Her many, entertaining stories helped me develop a better appreciation for the changing Honduran landscape and the lives of some of this country’s key historical figures. My husband made countless sacrifices to facilitate this work and make my graduation possible. His endless love, kind words and support sustained me throughout all my years in this doctoral program. I could not have asked for a more caring and understanding partner in life. I look forward to sharing the fruits of these many years of sacrifice with him. Above all, I thank God for listening to my family’s and my prayers, keeping me safe during my adventures in Honduras and ensuring this project would come to fruition.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADEVAS  
Asociación para el Desarrollo del Valle de Sensenti
Development Association for the Valley of Sensenti

AESMO  
Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos, Ocotepeque
Ecological Association of San Marcos, Ocotepeque

AMHON  
Asociación de Municipios de Honduras
Association of Honduran Municipalities

ANACH  
Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras
National Association of Honduran Peasants

ANDI  
Asociación Nacional de Industriales
National Association of Industrialists

APOPA  
Asamblea Permanente de las Organizaciones Populares del Aguán
Popular Assembly of Popular Organizations from the Aguán

APROBANOR  
Asociación de Productores Bananeros del Norte
Northern Banana Producers Association

ASONOG  
Asociación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales
Association of Honduran Non-Governmental Organizations

CCD  
Comisión Cristiana de Desarrollo
Christian Development Commission

CCIC  
Camara de Comercio e Industria de Cortés
Cortes Chamber of Commerce and Industry

CCIT  
Camara de Comercio e Industria de Tegucigalpa
Tegucigalpa’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry

CCUC  
Comité Central de Unificación Campesina
Central Committee for Peasant Union

CEDEN  
Comité Evangelica de Emergencias Nacionales
Evangelical National Emergency Committee
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<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Confederación General de Trabajadores</td>
<td>General Workers Confederation</td>
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<td>COAPALMA</td>
<td>Cooperativa Agroindustrial de Palma</td>
<td>Agroindustrial Palm Tree Cooperative</td>
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<td>CODECO</td>
<td>Comisiones de Desarrollo Comunal</td>
<td>Community Development Commissions</td>
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<td>CODEH</td>
<td>Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos</td>
<td>Committee for the Defense of Human Rights</td>
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<td>CODEM</td>
<td>Comité de Desarrollo Municipal</td>
<td>Municipal Development Committee</td>
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<td>CODEPO</td>
<td>Comisión de Desarrollo Departamental de Ocotepeque</td>
<td>Development Commission of the Department of Ocotepeque</td>
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<td>COFADEH</td>
<td>Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Honduras</td>
<td>Committee of Honduran Families of the Detained and Disappeared</td>
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<td>COHEP</td>
<td>Corporación Hondureña de la Empresa Privada</td>
<td>Honduran Private Enterprise Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONE</td>
<td>Comisión Nacional de Emergencia</td>
<td>National Emergency Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPECO</td>
<td>Comisión Permanente de Contingencias</td>
<td>Permanent Contingency Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSC</td>
<td>Comisión para la Participacion de la Sociedad Civil en el Proceso de Reconstruccion y Transformación Nacional</td>
<td>Commission for the Participation of Civil Society in National Reconstruction and Transformation</td>
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<td>CTH</td>
<td>Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras</td>
<td>Confederation of Honduran Workers</td>
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<td>EAC</td>
<td>Empresas Campesinas Asociativas</td>
<td>Associative Peasant Enterprises</td>
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<td>FACACH</td>
<td>Federación de Cooperativas de Ahorro y Crédito de Honduras</td>
<td>Federation of Honduran Credit and Savings Cooperatives</td>
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<td>FAFH</td>
<td>Federación de Asociaciones Femeninas de Honduras</td>
<td>Federation of Female Associations of Honduras</td>
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<tr>
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<td>FASH</td>
<td>Federación Autentica Sindical de Honduras</td>
<td>Authentic Federation of Honduran Syndicates</td>
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<td>Federación Central de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Libres de Honduras</td>
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<td>Federación de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria de Honduras</td>
<td>Federation of the Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Honduras</td>
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<td>Federación Hondureña de Mujeres Campesinas</td>
<td>Honduran Federation of Peasant Women</td>
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<td>Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios de Honduras</td>
<td>Federation of Honduran University Students</td>
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<td>Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social</td>
<td>Honduran Social Investment Fund</td>
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<td>Honduran Workers’ Federation</td>
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<td>National Convergence Forum</td>
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<td>Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible</td>
<td>National Fund for Sustainable Rural Development</td>
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<td>Foro Social para la Deuda Externa</td>
<td>Social Forum on Foreign Debt</td>
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<td>Federación Privada de Organizaciones en Desarrollo</td>
<td>Private Federation of Development Organizations</td>
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<td>Frente Popular de Organizaciones Populares de Sabá</td>
<td>Popular Front of Popular Organizations from Sabá</td>
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF DISASTER AND FOREIGN AID: NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN HONDURAS AFTER HURRICANE MITCH

By
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May 2003

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This dissertation presents qualitative and quantitative data to analyze how Hurricane Mitch and the foreign aid that followed it affected national and subnational governance in Honduras. Governance is understood as the way a state and its society interact in order to manage their institutions and public affairs. The national level analysis revealed that the state initially became more centralized and authoritarian in response to the disaster while civil society increased its intra-group cooperation and political activity. Foreign donors pressured the Honduran state to alter its relationship with civil society by conditioning its aid and disseminating a development discourse based on concepts such as citizen participation, decentralization and transparency. This foreign pressure, though not aimed directly at civil society, nevertheless motivated it to demand political inclusion and change. This domestic and foreign pressure together forced the Honduran government to incorporate civil society in its decision-making processes. This shift towards a more participatory style governance did not represent a
dramatic break with the past. The experience of disaster and foreign aid intervention merely accelerated a political transformation that had been underway for at least a decade.

The subnational level analysis sought to determine whether the changes witnessed at the national level had been replicated in different Honduran municipalities. It also tried to ascertain whether the disaster, foreign aid or both were responsible for producing socio-political changes. Four municipalities were selected for this part of the study. One was impacted by both the disaster and foreign aid, another by neither, and the remaining two by only one of the independent variables. The subnational level research suggests that the experience of disaster created a window of opportunity for change but that foreign aid organizations were responsible for much of the socio-political transformations that were observed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Mitch, a storm with sustained one-minute surface winds of 155 knots, began battering the small country of Honduras on October 27, 1998. Mitch made landfall near the city of La Ceiba on October 29 after hovering off the northern coast of Honduras for nearly two days. The storm moved southward then westward, slowly dissecting the country until finally entering Guatemalan territory on November 1.\(^1\) Although Mitch was downgraded to a tropical storm the day after reaching land, it poured as much as 50 cubic inches of water in some parts of the country.\(^2\) The floods it produced were larger and more damaging than any that had been recorded previously.\(^3\) The predominantly mountainous topography of Honduras aggravated the rainfall’s effects by producing several flash floods and mudslides. Within just a few days, most of the country’s major rivers had broken their banks, deposited large quantities of sediment in new areas and thus reshaped the Honduran landscape.


\(^3\) Ibid.
The disaster took a severe human toll.\(^4\) Approximately 5,600 Hondurans died,\(^5\) over 12,000 were injured and more than 8,000 were never found. The storm destroyed or severely damaged over 85,000 homes, leaving 396,000 people homeless. An additional 260,000 individuals were forced to seek temporary shelter. Most of these victims came from the northern departments of Cortés and Colón and the southern department of Choluteca. In total, it is estimated that approximately two million people or a third of Honduras’ 1998 population were directly impacted by the storm.

Mitch had a devastating effect on Honduras’ infrastructure. Approximately 100 bridges and 70\% of the country’s road system was damaged or destroyed.\(^6\) This inhibited the national government’s ability to respond quickly to the disaster and left the capital city of Tegucigalpa temporarily cut off from major North Coast towns. Most of the urban and nearly half of the rural aqueduct system in the country was impaired also. Tegucigalpa was left with no potable water for several days while other urban centers had only limited access to this resource. Several rural areas were unable to repair their aqueduct system for over a year after Mitch. The heavy rains and mudslides also wiped

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\(^4\) Unless otherwise noted, the information reported in this paragraph is derived from Gobierno de Honduras (GOH), *Estimaciones preliminares sobre daños causados por el Huracán Mitch a la infraestructura pública y costos de recuperación*, (Tegucigalpa: GOH, 1998); Naciones Unidas, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), *Honduras: evaluación de daños ocasionados por el Huracán Mitch, 1998*, internal report writen 26 de enero de 1999.

\(^5\) More conservative though also less reliable sources estimate that the death toll was less than half the official figure. See Richard Olson et al., *The Storms of '98: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch—Impacts, Institutional Response, and Disaster Politics in Three Countries*. Special Publication #38 (Boulder: Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, University of Colorado, 2001): 41.

away 63% of the land under agricultural production. Banana and sugar, two main export crops, suffered the bulk of the damage. In addition, over half of the surface area cultivated with corn, beans and rice—the staples of the Honduran diet—were destroyed.

The international community responded quickly to this devastation. Bilateral and multilateral aid agencies channeled over $93 million in emergency assistance to Honduras. This was followed by an additional $2.38 billion in foreign assistance to support the reconstruction process. Most of this money was channeled directly to the national government. Meanwhile, countless non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offered more direct assistance to the communities that had been most affected by the storm. This national and local-level aid helped disaster victims not only reconstruct the material goods that had been destroyed by the storm, but also reshape socio-political relations.

Although the Honduran government and donor agencies have analyzed the material effects of Hurricane Mitch, little is known about the political impact of the storm or the foreign aid that followed it. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap by exploring how this natural disaster and the concomitant aid that followed it have affected the nature of democratic governance in Honduras. Rather than privy either elites, civil society or institutions, this dissertation will look at the interaction among all of these by using the theoretical lens of governance. Governance is understood here as the way states and societies interact in order to create, manage and change both political institutions and the

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7 Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (DGEC), Secretaría de Industria y Comercio, Gobierno de Honduras, *Encuesta para estimar perdidas ocasionadas por el Huracán Mitch en el sector agropecuario* (Tegucigalpa: DGEC, 1999).

8 Gobierno de Honduras, *La nueva Honduras tarea para todos: informe de avances en la reconstrucción y transformación nacional* (Tegucigalpa: Gobierno de Honduras, 1999).
public policies that are designed within them. This study explores whether disasters and foreign aid agencies encouraged political elites and civil society groups to relate to each other in new ways and change existing institutions.

This dissertation acknowledges that governance is a multi-layered process. The way a state and civil society interact in the capital may be very different from the way local political elites and citizens interact at the grassroots level. Moreover, a disaster and foreign aid organizations may have a different impact on distinct regions of a country. Therefore, this work analyzes both national and subnational governance change in Honduras. The subnational level analysis not only tries to determine whether the changes witnessed in the capital were replicated at a municipal level. It also tries to control two independent variables—the experience of disaster and foreign assistance—in order to test whether one or both of these was responsible for the political changes observed at the national level.

Chapter two of this dissertation presents the theoretical framework that is to guide the analysis of Honduran politics. It reviews the literature on disasters, foreign aid, NGOs and governance in order to show how these diverse theoretical approaches can be used to understand state-society relations in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch. The embryonic literature on the politics of disaster reveals that hurricanes, earthquakes and other such unforeseen events can produce significant political transformations, but it has not specified how this change might arise. Although disasters have been shown to increase the social cohesion and organization of an affected community, this cooperative spirit tends to be fleeting. In a few cases, civil society has been strengthened in the aftermath of disaster, but only because other factors have contributed to this process. The
NGO literature reveals that these aid organizations often contribute to the development of a strong civil society. They do this by encouraging target groups to organize and become politically involved and by becoming active participants in the political process themselves. In either case, NGOs can contribute to democratization by working at the grass-roots level and increasing domestic social pressure for political change. Bilateral and multilateral aid agencies can deepen democracy also by pressuring national governments to alter existing institutions or policies. They accomplish this by conditioning their aid, disseminating a specific development discourse and influencing the norms held by a country’s political elite. All of these measures can coerce a national government to change its closed, authoritarian structures and improve its relationship with civil society. When considered together, these three theoretical approaches suggest that if NGOs and foreign donors are sufficiently present and influential in a country after a disaster, they may animate and help sustain autonomous forms of social organization and pressure the state to work more closely with these groups. The literature on governance offers us a way of studying the nature and effects of this state-society relationship. It forces us to look at the strength and political activism of civil society organizations, the state’s responsiveness to them, and the extent to which both participate in the maintenance and creation of public policies and institutions. In other words, theories of governance help us focus on how external forces such as disasters, donors and NGOs affect the relational patterns that maintain democratic regimes.

Chapter three of this dissertation offers a historical review of national-level governance in Honduras. Since few organized groups existed in the country before the 1950’s, most of this chapter is dedicated to discussing the evolution of civil society and
the way it interacted with the state after this period. The chapter notes that the initial mass-based groups in the country—labor unions, peasant organizations and women’s groups—were forced to take a confrontational approach to the state in order to be heard by the political elite. These organizations grew to command such a large and militant following that by the late 1960’s and 1970’s they were demanding that the traditionally closed, partisan and unrepresentative state structures be reformed. Through various public protest activities, these groups successfully pressured for the creation of a National Unity Government and, when this failed, for a reformist military government that was more responsive to them. Despite these achievements, civil society groups continued to be excluded from public decision-making processes. Moreover, these groups were demobilized during the late 1970’s and 1980’s by conservative, military elements who assumed control of the state. The state repression that was unleashed during this period not only failed to destroy traditional, mass-based groups but also gave birth to a new generation of civil society organizations which struggled to secure human rights, indigenous rights and democratization. This domestic pressure eventually combined with a changing international environment to bring about a slow transition to democracy in Honduras. Although civil society groups were unable to sustain a strong level of cooperation and mobilization after the re-establishment of constitutional rule, they succeeded in enticing political elites to work more closely with them and begin integrating them into the decision-making process. State-centered elites created new, corporatist arrangements during the 1990’s in order to unite different civil society groups and dialogue more easily with them. Although these corporatist structures enabled the government to coopt and appease mass organizations, they also established a new, non-
confrontational channel of communication between the state and civil society. Consequently, the traditional, exclusionary and state-centered pattern of governance that had typified Honduras for most of its history began to change. It was within this context of slow, political transition that Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras in late 1998.

Chapter four discusses how this devastating natural event and the flood of foreign aid that followed it affected the Honduran state, civil society and their relationship with each other. Both of these groups initially responded to the disaster in distinct ways. The state, though clearly unable to manage emergency operations on its own, tried to implement the authoritarian and exclusionary pattern of governance that traditionally had characterized Honduras. Meanwhile, much of civil society was mobilized by the disaster. Regular citizens, NGOs and other interest groups began to cooperate with one another and undertake relief work that the state was unable to tackle on its own. This activism and cooperative spirit continued in 1999 as the Honduran government began to shift its attention to the longer-term goal of reconstruction. Initially, the state accepted the recommendations of traditional, mass-based groups represented in the corporatist structures it had created in the mid-1990’s. But it refused to collaborate with other members of civil society, particularly NGOs and intellectual-based groups. These later organizations began to question the legitimacy of existing corporatist arrangements and challenge the state to transform pre-existing social, economic and political structures. Though hesitant to cooperate with these groups, the state was persuaded to change its stance toward them by foreign donors who conditioned their reconstruction assistance on the government’s willingness to increase citizen participation in government. Thus, foreign aid organizations ensured that Honduras continued the process it had begun years
earlier of establishing an open and inclusive style of governance. Although the new spaces of citizen participation that were created during the three years after Mitch had several limitations, citizen groups successfully used them to pressure the government for institutional change.

The subsequent three chapters explore whether the gradual shift in governance that was observed at the national level was replicated at the local level. Chapter five introduces the reader to four municipal case studies. Each of these was chosen in order to determine whether the experience of disaster, advent of foreign aid or both improved civil society’s activism and relationship with municipal officials. Sabá and Potrerillos were two of the most disaster-stricken areas of the country. Most of the infrastructure in these regions was damaged or destroyed and a majority of the population there suffered partial or total home loss. As a result, multiple NGOs began working in Sabá during the two years after the storm and encouraged target groups to organize and become active participants in their reconstruction. Despite also having experienced major storm damage, Potrerillos at first did not receive the same degree of external assistance as Sabá. Disaster victims were supplied with vinyl tents and basic food supplies, but they received relatively little NGO assistance. An analysis of this case allows us to control for the effect of aid and explore how the experience of disaster alone affected civil society and its relationship with local government authorities. Unlike these two municipalities, San Marcos and Dolores Merendón experienced almost no storm damage. Nevertheless, NGOs began working in Dolores Merendón during 1999 and 2000 in order to counter the high level of poverty in the region. This municipally shows how NGO assistance alone can contribute to the development of civil society and affect local-level governance.
Sabá, which experienced a disaster and massive NGO assistance, measures the socio-political effects of both of these independent variables while San Marcos, which was not affected by either of these external events, is used to test the null hypothesis.

Figure 1-1. Municipal case studies in Honduras.

Chapter six tries to add historical context to our municipal level analysis by comparing the pre-disaster, organizational experiences of these four case studies. Both Potrerillos and Sabá were integrated into the world capitalist system and labor market during the early part of the twentieth century foreign-owned banana plantations who operated in these regions. Consequently, labor unions became active in both municipalities beginning in the 1950’s. Agrarian reform and other popular based groups also proliferated there during the following two decades. In addition, the Catholic Church became very socially active in Sabá during 1970’s and afterward—a pattern that
was not replicated in Potrerillos. Although the population of Sabá was somewhat more militant than the one in Potrerillos, the citizens of both regions were fairly well organized up until the 1990’s when civil society in both of these municipalities began to weaken. Unlike these two Northern Coast towns, San Marco and Dolores Merendón were not as well integrated into the world capitalist system. Although farmers from both regions were involved in coffee production, they worked for themselves and also produced basic food crops. As a result, few labor unions emerged in these municipalities. A very active civil society did emerge in San Marcos as a result of national agrarian reform policies, the Catholic Church’s activism and the implementation of a multi-million dollar United Nations development program during the early 1990’s. But no such social organization developed in Dolores Merendón. These different organizational histories are highlighted in order to see if citizens here responded to exogenous forces in ways that were familiar to them.

Chapter seven presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of how a disaster and NGO assistance influenced grass-roots civil society and its relationship with municipal authorities. The chapter reveals that the residents of Sabá and Potrerillos reverted to pre-existing, often defunct forms of organization in order to confront the disaster. Although this solidarity was maintained for several weeks after Mitch, it began to decline once emergency and relief operations came to an end. Over a year after Mitch, the residents of Potrerillos were unorganized and maintained little contact with their political officials. Consequently, this municipality maintained its traditional pattern of governance. The advent of NGOs in Sabá, however, seems to have prevented citizens there from falling into a state of disunity. NGOs encouraged residents to maintain and deepen their new
level of cooperation. They also worked to raise citizen awareness of broader socio-political issues and encouraged them to become active political participants. As a result, citizens began to question the closed and authoritarian nature of governance in this municipality. They demanded to have town hall meetings and be included in local, public decision-making processes. All of this succeeded in initiating a change in local-level governance here. Although Dolores Merendón began receiving some external assistance from NGOs during 1999 and 2000, it did not reveal as high a percentage increase in community organization or political activity as did Sabá. Nevertheless, citizens did cooperate more with each other and try to contact their government officials more frequently than previously. Most likely, the absence of a major crisis event coupled with the regions’ lack of organizational and political experience lessened the socio-political effects of NGO intervention. San Marcos, which was not affected by either a disaster or new NGOs, did not experience an increase in social or political activity, as expected. However, this municipality had been hailed as a model of “good governance” during the early to mid 1990’s as a result of the socio-political changes that several NGOs and a United Nations program had encouraged there at the time. An analysis of this case in 2000 shows whether and under what conditions governance change can endure once the forces that catalyzed this process have disappeared. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the presence of foreign assistance has a greater impact on social organization and governance than the experience of disaster alone. However, the presence of both of these exogenous forces seems to heighten their socio-political impact. Moreover, pre-existing organizational experiences can facilitate the re-organization and political activism of civil society.
The final chapter of this dissertation summarizes the results of our post-Mitch governance study and discusses their theoretical relevance. Building on the events that transpired in Honduras after Mitch and the experience of San Marcos, the chapter speculates as to whether the socio-political changes that were observed in the two years after Mitch can be sustained in the long term to contribute to a broader process of democratization. Together, all of these chapters help deepen our knowledge of governance, the political effects of disaster and the way NGOs and foreign donors can reinforce each other’s socio-political effects.
CHAPTER 2
DISASTERS, FOREIGN AID AND GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Disasters represent dramatic shocks to human systems. They temporarily disrupt livelihood strategies, deconstruct social arrangements and give victims the opportunity to reconstruct their lives in new ways. Although a handful of scholars have considered how such extraordinary events can affect the political sphere, much of this literature is still in an embryonic stage and in need of further research. Since foreign aid often is channeled to a locality after a disaster, the political effects of this type of intervention must also be considered. Some scholars view the assistance that follows a disaster as part of the experience of disaster itself. Although these two events are interrelated, this dissertation tries to disentangle them in order to study their individual effects on governance. The following sections will review what is currently known about the political effects of both disasters and external assistance. Then it will explain why theories of governance are best suited to understanding these phenomena.

The Political Effects of Disasters

Disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and floods are more than just environmental events. They disrupt the daily lives and social interactions of those who experience them and call into question prevailing social arrangements. They must, therefore, be viewed as socio-political as well as natural events. Disasters may impact individual behavior, community organizations and broader macro structures. They tend to unite and mobilize victims as well as alter political structures that are unresponsive to
them. The changes prompted by natural disasters are not always enduring, however. As life reverts to some state of pre-disaster normalcy, so too does people’s behavior.

Individuals who suffer through natural disasters respond to these events in varying ways. Hoffman, Form and Nosow claim that during the minutes immediately following this crisis, victims act in an individualistic manner in order to safeguard their basic needs and that of their family.\(^1\) Oliver-Smith has suggested that people’s responses to disaster may be more varied: some flee, others struggle to rescue both themselves and close family members, while still others offer assistance to anyone who may be in need of help.\(^2\) However, most agree that once the initial impact of a disaster subsides, community solidarity and cooperation increases.\(^3\) Victims may unite to share scarce food, clothing or other belongings and work teams may be formed to jointly cook food, rescue others or build temporary shelters.\(^4\) The extended though non-affected community also usually responds to this crisis by volunteering their time and belongings to those less fortunate than they. Socio-cultural differences tend to be ignored during emergency periods as people from different ethnic, racial, class or religious backgrounds assist one


another. Often times, those previously isolated from their neighbors may unite and cooperate with them after a disaster. Women, for instance, may be encouraged to leave the confines of their homes and participate in community issues or join support groups after a major crisis. All of these activities help to temporarily strengthen civil society.

The organizational history of a locality shapes the way people will respond to a crisis. The relief crews formed during an emergency may be patterned along the lines of pre-existing and often defunct modes of organization. The way people handle or bury the dead may be consistent with long-standing community norms. And long-standing, social class distinctions may shape who undertakes what type of emergency work. In some cases, disasters may prompt the reemergence of deeply rooted cultural patterns that had been replaced by more modern ones. All of this suggests, as Drabek has argued, that “the theme of continuity is the logical starting point for trying to understand


organizational responses immediately after disaster impact. People do not abandon their social histories when confronted with adversity—and organizational systems reflect it.”

Disaster victims do not unite and organize only in ways that are familiar to them. New groups frequently emerge during the post-disaster, emergency phase. These may include search and rescue teams, communal soup kitchens or shelter coordinating committees. Although the existence of some previous organizational experience facilitates the emergence of this type of activity, the people participating in these new groups need not be those who were organized in the past. Various conditions may facilitate the creation of new associations. Stallings has noted that “emergent groups tend to appear where people are isolated from emergency organizations and where there is a lack of information, control and coordination.” Paar, Palmer and Sells also have suggested that when the official authority lapses and fails to respond adequately to the needs of a community or when a community is either unprepared or has no previous experience dealing with a disaster, then new groups are more likely to arise. These emergent groups differ from those that exist during normal times in that they tend to be informal in structure and temporal in nature. Once the crisis has subsided, they generally disappear.

12 Drabek, *Human Systems Responses to Disaster*, 158.


More formal and permanent organizations also may arise in response to disasters. Fox and Hernández have noted that the number of NGOs in Mexico increased after the 1985 earthquake there.\textsuperscript{17} The same occurred in Nicaragua after the 1972 quake.\textsuperscript{18} In both cases, the NGOs that arose and proliferated after the disaster eventually formed linkages with one another as well as with broader, national social movements. These organizations did not disappear as do most emergent groups. Instead, they helped build stronger civil societies and enabled citizens to tackle national, socio-political issues in their countries.

Disasters may affect broader political structures because they represent exogenous shocks to the political system, increasing the number of citizen demands while simultaneously reducing a government’s response capabilities.\textsuperscript{19} Cuny explains that “disasters often highlight the social struggles in society and underscore the inherent inequities within a political system. Earthquakes and hurricanes, for example, affect a disproportionately high percentage of the poor in developing countries … A disaster makes it very evident that the poor are vulnerable because they are poor.”\textsuperscript{20} Shefner, Drury and Olson have supported this assertion by presenting a longitudinal study, which shows that countries with an inequitable distribution of wealth and/or a history of social


or political strife tend to experience a rise in political conflict after disasters.\textsuperscript{21} The incidence of such politically unsettling events has led Olson to assert that disasters “may throw into question the very legitimacy of the authoritative allocation process itself—the regime.”\textsuperscript{22}

Case studies reveal that the political systems of several Latin American countries have been destabilized by natural disasters during the last half century. The 1972 Managua earthquake set in motion forces that eventually led to the demise of the Somoza regime and gave rise to socialism there.\textsuperscript{23} Black argues that “the importance of the earthquake as a pivotal moment in the disintegration of Somocismo can hardly be overstated.”\textsuperscript{24} In the aftermath of the disaster Somoza, the National Guard and members of the ruling triumvirate were involved in several incidents of corruption.\textsuperscript{25} Although such behavior may have been accepted or may have typified the Nicaraguan political system during normal times, citizens were unwilling to tolerate corruption during the

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\textsuperscript{22} Richard Stuart Olson, “Towards a Politics of Disaster.”


\textsuperscript{24} George Black, \textit{Triumph of the People}, 58.

emergency and reconstruction periods.\textsuperscript{26} The press exposed and denounced such behavior\textsuperscript{27} and the bourgeoisie, which until then had offered tenuous support to Somoza, turned against him.\textsuperscript{28} Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with the regime also grew among the lower and middle classes who increasingly demanded fundamental political changes in their country.\textsuperscript{29} All of these factors revived and strengthened support for the \textit{Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional} (FSLN), a guerrilla group that had been “presumed dead since 1970.”\textsuperscript{30} The mounting opposition to the regime and rise in political violence during the years after the earthquake eventually led to a regime transition in Nicaragua in 1979.

The Guatemalan political system also was strained after the 1976 earthquake there. Dunkerley notes that “the political impact of the earthquake was sharp if not—in the short term—quite the same in form as that in Nicaragua four years earlier.”\textsuperscript{31} Part of the problem arose from the government’s mishandling of emergency and reconstruction assistance. Although approximately 25,000 Guatemalans were killed and 1.25 million were left homeless, the government offered only scant relief to the highland Mayan

\textsuperscript{26} Olson and Gawronski have shown in the case of Mexico that although incidents of corruption may be tolerated by citizens during normal times, they are not accepted during post disaster periods. Citizen reactions to corruption charges in Nicaragua after the 1972 earthquake suggest that the populace there experienced a similar decline in tolerance for such behavior. See Richard Stuart Olson and Vincent T. Gawronski, “Normal Versus Special Time Corruption: An Exploration of Mexican Attitudes,” forthcoming \textit{Cambridge Journal of International Affairs} 15:1 (Spring-Summer 2001).

\textsuperscript{27} Denis Lynn Daly Heyck, \textit{Life Stories of the Nicaraguan Revolution} (New York: Routledge, 1990): 49.


\textsuperscript{29} John A Booth, \textit{The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution}, 84, 113, 124-125 and 277.

\textsuperscript{30} Anderson, \textit{Politics in Central America}, 156-159.

\textsuperscript{31} Dunkerley, \textit{Power in the Isthmus}, 469.
communities which had been most affected by the disaster. In addition, the government persecuted missionary and other humanitarian groups who tried to supply needed help to these areas independently of official, state channels.\textsuperscript{32} Peasants, particularly those in affected areas of the country, responded by organizing, criticizing the government and articulating their demands better than ever before.\textsuperscript{33} Meanwhile, several companies took advantage of the post-disaster crisis to lay off hundreds of workers and thus weaken labor unions. Workers responded by consolidating themselves into a united front and demanding that both their labor rights be secured and that the government respond to the needs of disaster victims.\textsuperscript{34} Jonas has noted that “some of the most important, urban-based movements” in Guatemala emerged “from the rubble of the massive earthquake of 1976 ... Not long after the earthquake, when the potential of these organizations became clear, the repression began.”\textsuperscript{35} Eventually, this post-disaster organization and the state’s responsiveness to it helped strengthen the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, which gained much of its support from those highland communities most affected by the disaster. Unlike the FSLN, this guerrilla group was unsuccessful in overthrowing the government or prompting a true regime transition in Guatemala. Instead, the increasing discontent and organization among civil society groups here led to a prolonged civil war.

The political violence that engrossed Nicaragua and Guatemala after the 1972 and 1976 earthquakes does not arise after all disasters. Nevertheless, such events may prompt

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  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid, capítulo VII.
\end{itemize}
equally destabilizing but less violent effects on a country’s political system. During the 1840’s three, devastating hurricanes passed over Cuba leaving a trail of destruction in their path. The experience of disaster and recovery united residents of the island and encouraged them to begin viewing themselves as Cubans. The disasters, in other words, contributed to the creation of a national identity. The Spanish government’s reluctance to offer emergency assistance to its subjects on the island or to ease temporarily import taxes on them caused a schism between Creoles and the crown.\textsuperscript{36} Although the dissatisfaction with monarchical rule and growing sense of national identity did not have any immediate political or violent repercussions, they contributed to the Cuban struggle for independence during the late 1800’s.

The 1985 Mexico City Earthquake also had a non violent though more immediate effect on that country’s political system. The earthquake led to a dramatic and spontaneous upsurge in civil society organizations whose prompt and coordinated response to this crisis juxtaposed it to the government’s slow, inappropriate and corrupt mismanagement of emergency assistance.\textsuperscript{37} Many civil society groups eventually united into an Earthquake Victim’s Movement which effectively “undermined the repressive discourse with which the government justified its exclusion of citizens from local government, challenged the legitimacy of the political status quo in the Federal District


and opened the door for the democratization of … Mexico City.” Although neither the earthquake nor these emergent groups radically altered the national political system, they accelerated socio-political changes that had already been underway and thus contributed to the democratization process in Mexico.

Disasters may also prompt more subtle policy changes. Using the United States as a focus of study, Birkland has argued that natural and technological disasters serve as focusing events in public policies. They help bring new issues to the agenda and allow new players to form part of the policy-making process. This may lead to the passage of new legislation, even ones that politicians had been hesitant to consider previously.

Although disasters can serve as catalysts for political change, they do not always serve this function. If well managed, these events may legitimize rather than destabilize a government or system of rule. The Argentine military’s adept response to the 1944 San Juan Earthquake helped the recently installed military junta legitimize its undemocratic hold of government. Perón’s seemingly compassionate role and involvement in relief efforts helped him rise in popularity and gain political control of Argentina soon after this event. Similarly, Hurricane Fifi (1974) helped the Honduran military solidify and extend its political control in Honduras. Although massive corruption diminished the

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effectiveness of the foreign aid that was received, the military government responded to this disaster by implementing an agrarian reform law and distributing land to thousands of Hondurans, many of whom had been adversely affected by the hurricane. This enabled the military to gain support of the peasants and remain in power until the early 1980’s.

Although disasters can contribute to socio-political changes, their ability to contribute to long-lasting, social transformations has been questioned by several sociological and anthropological studies. Siegel et al have presented a longitudinal study revealing that neither social cohesion nor disunity persists for long after a disaster.42 Once people’s emergency needs have been met and they have returned to their normal and routinized mode of life, communities tend to revert back to the way they were before the disaster. This has been further corroborated by qualitative, post-disaster studies.43 The groups that arise during the emergency phase tend to disappear, and traditional leaders and organizations re-emerge.44 Sweet has shown that social behavior may return to its pre-disaster pattern as early as a month after the initial shock.45 All of this suggests that long-term, disaster-induced, social change is rare. Those changes that do persist tend to be ones that were under way or under consideration before the crisis.46


44 Oliver-Smith, *Martyred City*, 120-121.


The preceding literature review suggests that countries that are devastated by disasters often experience significant political transformations soon afterward. Such changes are more likely to occur in places with an inequitable distribution of wealth and a history of socio-political conflict. What has not been adequately explained is why political change arises in these contexts. One could argue that disasters encourage the organization of victims, highlight the commonalities between them, and encourage them to act in the interest of the public good. Such mobilization eventually spills into the political sphere, increases people’s voice in politics and often leads to a change in the political system. In other words, one could argue that disasters strengthen civil society, change existing governance patterns and thus contribute to a process of democratization.

Unfortunately, the existing disaster literature does not support this contention. Although various studies have shown that disasters prompt the organization and mobilization of affected communities, they also reveal that this activity is evanescent. The only social transformations that do persist are those that were already underway before the disaster. So how or why might a political change arise? Do disasters cause enduring transformations in the way citizens participate in politics but not in the way they interact with neighbors? Do they only catalyze political changes among people with a history of strong organization and political mobilization? Do they hasten political transformations that had been initiated before the disaster or can they spur new ones? Could other factors mediate how or when disasters affect the political sphere? These are just some of the questions to be explored in this dissertation. Before these queries are answered, we must consider the socio-political effects of foreign aid, be it derived from foreign governments, multilateral agencies or NGOs.
The Political Effects of Foreign Aid

Foreign aid is frequently transferred to disaster-afflicted areas soon after the initial shock of such an event. But the way such assistance is channeled varies considerably depending on the source of such funds. Bilateral and multilateral agencies usually extend assistance to the central government rather than to those communities or regions most affected by disasters. Their aid frequently is used to undertake broad socio-economic policies or infrastructural projects as well as to improve the state’s ability to implement these. Due to their macro focus, such aid tends to have little impact on average citizens or local structures. NGOs, on the other hand, generally offer their assistance directly to target communities, often bypassing political authorities or at least excluding them from participating in the dissemination of such aid. Unlike bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs try to address localized issues and concerns, many of which are self-identified by recipient groups. Due to their level of intervention, international donors tend to influence national level politics. They do so by encouraging state agencies to be more open and responsive to the general populace and thus creating spaces for improved state-society relations. NGOs are most likely to influence local, socio-political issues. They encourage the organization and mobilization of aid recipients and thus enable them to engage their government representatives more efficiently. Although both types of donors play an active role in developing countries during normal times, their level and degree of intervention usually increases in the aftermath of disaster, making their socio-political impact more evident. The following sections will review what is known about the political effects of both international donors and NGOs.
International Donor Impact

Bilateral and multilateral donors have been shown to have a significant impact on the process of democratic consolidation. They have accomplished this by conditioning their financial assistance, popularizing a particular development discourse and disseminating their norms and ideas through these means. This external pressure partly resulted in a “Third Wave” of democracy during the late 1970’s and 1980’s\(^\text{47}\) and to a deepening of democracy since then.

The use of conditionalities has been one of the principal ways through which bilateral and multilateral agencies have promoted their vision of democratic governance. A conditionality, as Nelson explains, “entails offering a benefit if … the receiver takes specific actions (or refrains from taking actions which the donor disapproves).”\(^\text{48}\) These benefits may be economic such as when an international agency offers a loan to a developing country on the condition that certain public policies be adopted. Or the incentive may be political such as when the European Union makes membership in its organization contingent upon having a stable democracy.\(^\text{49}\) The incentive may also be positive or negative in form. A donor may use its assistance to reward a country for adopting certain policy or institutional changes or it may threaten to withdraw or not distribute aid if specific conditions are not met. Not all countries are affected equally by

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\(^{47}\) Huntington, *The Third Wave*.


such conditionalities.\textsuperscript{50} Those possessing strong exports such as oil tend to be more insulated from these external pressures than countries such as Honduras that are dependent on banana and coffee production.

The use of conditionalities has evolved significantly during the last half century. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and several bilateral donors have been attaching conditions to the loans they disburse since their foundation. Initially, most of these conditions were project specific.\textsuperscript{51} The focus was on designing good development projects and policies. After the oil crisis of the 1970’s, international financial institutions began broadening and increasing the qualifying factors for their aid by requiring loan recipients to implement neo-liberal economic reforms. This led several governments to transfer many of its functions to the market and adopt structural adjustment packages.\textsuperscript{52} Initially, neither these financial institutions nor other international donors conditioned their aid on political reforms, but this began to change during the 1970’s when a network of NGOs began publicizing and raising public awareness of human rights abuses being committed throughout the world.\textsuperscript{53} President Jimmy Carter’s administration responded to this situation by making U.S. foreign development assistance contingent on human rights protection. Other European governments adopted the same policy. Since most human rights violations were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Nelson, Encouraging Democracy, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid and Nelson, Encouraging Democracy, 33-39.
\end{itemize}
committed by military or authoritarian governments at the time, bilateral donors began using their aid packages to promote transitions to democracy, as well.\(^{54}\) By the 1980’s most bilateral donors were encouraging both democratization and human rights protection through the use of conditionalities.

Some multilateral aid agencies were more hesitant to advocate these political reforms. The World Bank and International Monetary Funds, for example, claimed that their founding charters prohibited them from becoming involved in the political institutions and procedures of aid recipient countries.\(^{55}\) They together with other donors also did not want to bias Western political norms and institutions such as those inherent in liberal democracy. Interestingly, these financial institutions did not refrain from encouraging the political changes associated with neo-liberal economic policies—that also had a Western bias. Nevertheless, by the 1980’s this unfettered faith in market capitalism had begun to waiver as the private sector proved itself unable to address the myriad problems faced by developing nations. The impressive economic accomplishments of a few industrializing countries in Eastern Asia and Latin America during the 1970’s and 1980’s proved that a strong, interventionist state could help achieve economic growth.\(^{56}\) Although the need for political reforms continued to be evidenced in many countries, theorists and policy makers alike increasingly acknowledged the need to


include the government in development policies. Still wary of promoting liberal democracy, international policy makers began discussing the need for better, more accountable governance.\(^{57}\) Donors generally defined governance as the way states, markets and civil society manage public affairs. The focus on governance allowed aid agencies to question the legitimacy of a political regime while seemingly avoiding the normative bias inherent in democratic systems.\(^{58}\) As Hewitt de Alcántara explains,

> By talking about ‘governance’—rather than ‘state reform’ or ‘social and political change’—multilateral banks and agencies within the development establishment were able to address sensitive questions that could be lumped together under a relatively inoffensive heading and usually couched in technical terms, thus avoiding any implication that these institutions were exceeding their statutory authority by intervening in the internal political affairs of sovereign states.\(^{59}\)

The adoption of good governance as a policy concern did not entail the abandonment of neo-liberalism. On the contrary, attention to governance enabled many organizations to advocate transferring what had traditionally been government responsibilities to either civil society or the market while also not ignoring the important role of the state in public affairs. Some development agencies, choosing not to forgo their emphasis on democracy, began espousing the need for *democratic* governance rather than the more generic good governance. By the 1990’s most development agencies were conditioning their aid on the presence of either one of these.


\(^{59}\) Hewlitt de Alcántara, “Uses and Abuses of the Concept of Governance,” 107.
Donors have promoted democratization and good governance not only through the use of conditionalities and material incentives, but also by disseminating a particular political discourse. Politicians and civil society groups in developing nations increasingly speak of the need to make governments more accountable, increase society’s role in public decision-making and create mechanisms and institutions that will improve state-society relations. The ideas disseminated through this discourse can help change a state’s conceptions of development.\footnote{Martha Finnemore, \textit{National Interests in International Society} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).} Although the degree of actual commitment to these ideational goals among those who profess them may be questionable, the mere fact that this language is being employed is politically significant. As Yee explains, “Language is crucial to the constitution of . . . reality.”\footnote{Albert S. Yee, “The Causal Effects of Ideation on Policy,” \textit{International Organization} 50:1 (Winter 1996):86.} In order for democracy to be consolidated, it must be preceded by a discussion of this process. The terms democracy and human rights, for example, were popularized by various international forces during the 1970’s and 1980’s until they became fundamental aspects of the political lexicon in much of the developed and developing world. This change in discourse eventually contributed to the increased protection of human rights and transition to elected civilian governments in dozens of countries.\footnote{Huntington, \textit{The Third Wave} and Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink, eds. \textit{The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).} Of course, the mere use of such language did not ensure that those employing it acted in concert with what they professed. Schirmer has shown how the Guatemalan military altered its discourse during the 1980’s in order to correspond better with the one being used by international donors at the time yet did little

By popularizing a particular discourse, foreign aid agencies can induce a shift in political norms. Since “a norm … creates impetus for behavior consistent with the belief,”\footnote{Ibid, 7.} a shift in norms usually leads to a concomitant behavioral adjustment. Therefore, normative changes can lead to significant political transformations. As Schmitz and Sell have explained, “the diffusion of democratic values and norms institutionalizes new ideas in a given national context, thus making available images of alternative regime types and influencing the changes in actors’ preferences and choices.”\footnote{Hans Peter Schmitz and Katrin Sell, “International Factors in Processes of Political Democratization,” \textit{Democracy Without Borders: Transnationalization and Conditionality in New Democracies}, Jean Grugel, ed. (London: Routledge: 1999): 37-38.} By transforming normative structures, donor agencies can also prompt
domestic policy changes. As ideas gain prominence among a large group of people they form an ideological structure that “inform[s] the structure of institutions, the nature of social cooperation and conflict, and the attitudes and predispositions of the population.”

The use of a particular discourse can also be used to gauge the performance of both the politicians who employ it and the regime they represent. Politicians who speak of human rights protection, government accountability, social auditing and eliminating corruption will likely be judged by international actors and their constituents on the basis of these concepts. In addition, political language helps frame the nature of political interactions. It “lends representative legitimacy to some social interests more than others, delineates the accepted boundaries of state action . . . and . . . privilege[s] some lines of policy over others.” All of this suggests that the new discourse on democratic governance that has been popularized since the 1990’s can help bring new actors to the political scene and make the policies they advocate more tenable.

Although bilateral and multilateral donors can exert significant influence over an aid recipient country, they do not determine the nature of politics there. The interests of local elites as well as a series of socio-economic factors mediate the extent to which international donors can affect national-level politics. Democracy, for example, seems more likely to arise in countries that have industrialized and developed a bourgeoisie


70 Peter A. Hall, “Policy Paradigms, Social Learning and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain,” *Comparative Politics* 25: 3 (April 993): 289.
class than in those characterized by agrarian and feudal-type structures. It is also best sustained by a strong civil society. Yet, the absence of these conditions does not preclude the rise and consolidation of democracy. Politicians may decide to strengthen democratic institutions despite the absence of these structural factors or instead choose to weaken them in order to pursue their personal interests. Foreign actors can hasten the process of democratization within either one of these contexts, particularly if a country is ripe for such a change. They do so by changing the incentive structure of national level politicians and forcing them to play what Putnam calls “two level games.” In an effort to appease international donors, national politicians may abide by their preconditions, adopt their discourse, accept new norms and thus improve their democracy.

Periods of domestic crisis can increase the influence of foreign agents by weakening the power of local elites and/or altering socio-economic conditions. Ikenberry and Kupchan argue that during such times hegemonic states are better able to socialize the elites of developing or “secondary” states into accepting their political ideas and norms. In their words, “crisis creates an environment in which elites seek alternatives to existing norms that have been discredited by events and in which new norms offer opportunities for political gains and coalition realignment.” Therefore, crisis can make

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73 Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 86.


ideas of democracy and good governance more attractive to domestic power brokers. Although Ikenberry and Kupchan analyze periods of political turmoil such as those created by war, foreign agents may be able to exert similar power over domestic actors during times of disaster-induced crisis. This research will explore whether this has occurred in Honduras.

**NGO Impact**

NGOs may contribute to the process of democratization as well. Unlike bilateral and multilateral donors, they do not do this by pressuring national governments to adopt certain ideas or policies. Instead, NGOs often contribute to this process by affecting the nature and constitution of civil society. Their intervention, in other words, is directed at the grass roots level rather than at the state-centered realm of high politics.

Several theorists have argued that NGOs can help strengthen civil society and thus advance democratization in a country. They accomplish this in part by bringing people together to implement NGO-sponsored development projects. This community building process has a direct bearing on civil society. As Wapner explains, NGOs “organize people into new forms of social interaction, and this makes for a more tightly woven web of associational life.” Yet NGOs do more than just unite people. They help beneficiary groups translate their needs into a set of well formulated objectives and then develop methods of action for achieving these. According to Carroll, this is accomplished by

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encouraging beneficiaries to participate in project decision making and implementation. Clark adds that NGOs foster strong local leadership, build communication skills, and encourage locals to tackle injustice. This often leads people to become more involved in local political issues. As a result of this political activism, NGOs as well as the community groups they support can affect the implementation of government policies and even challenge established power structures at the local level. An NGOs’ impact is not always constrained to this level of politics, however. These organizations may support social movements or encourage project beneficiaries to mobilize in order to influence national policies. The potentially positive impact that NGOs can have on civil society has led many bilateral and multilateral donors to finance the activities of such organizations since the 1980s.

Not all NGOs have this democratizing effect. Those non-governmental organizations that only distribute credit or similar assistance or who primarily serve a social or recreational purpose are unlikely to have any political impact. Carroll argues that NGOs that focus on grassroots development and on organizing target communities

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are the ones most likely to encourage people to act together to tackle political issues.84
Similarly, Frantz contends that NGOs that support social movements or initiatives that
express the free will of the people are the ones most likely to strengthen civil society.85

Some scholars doubt that even these specific NGOs can make such contributions to
democracy. Hulme and Edwards accept the contention that NGOs can help form
community organizations. However, they argue that these groups are often created only
to achieve project goals and do not articulate, represent or achieve member needs.86 They
together with Huduck and Bazaara contend that the relationship between NGOs and
donors can limit further the extent to which these organizations can contribute to social
change.87 This is because NGO projects tend to respond to the goals of and be
accountable to donor agencies rather than target groups.88 As a result, the latter are rarely
allowed to affect the design and implementation of the projects that are meant to benefit
them. This situation may engender a paternalistic and dependent relationship between

84 Carroll, Intermediary NGOs.

85 Frantz, “The Role of NGOs in the Strengthening of Civil Society,” 123.

86 Michael Edwards and David Hulme, eds. Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and
Accountability in the Post Cold War (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian, 1996); David Hulme
and Michael Edwards, “Too Close to the Powerful, Too Far from the Powerless,” NGOs States and

87 Ann Huduck, NGOs and Civil Society: Democracy by Proxy? (Cambridge: Polity
Press, 1999) and Nyangabyak Bazaara, Contemporary Civil Society and the
Democratisation Process in Uganda: A Preliminary Exploration (Kampala, Uganda:
CBR Publications 2000) and David Hulme and Michael Edwards, eds., NGOs States and

88 Ibid and Cristina Ewig, “The Strengths and Limits of the NGOs Women’s Movement Model: Shaping
NGOs and the communities they seek to benefit. Abramson argues that in some developing countries NGOs are used by a small, professional elite as vehicles to secure jobs and higher incomes for themselves and their cohorts and do little to contribute to socio-political change or development. Although such scenarios do not typify all NGOs, they do caution that these organizations should not be seen as “a panacea for making uncivil societies civil.”

NGOs’ potential contribution to democracy is not limited to their ability to organize target groups and encourage them to participate in politics. NGOs are often active participants in their country’s political system, as well. Therefore, they do not merely help strengthen civil society through their effects on others, but are themselves an active part of it. NGOs use their experience to position themselves into and influence political debates of the day. As Pyle has explained, “NGOs are uniquely equipped to work simultaneously at the grassroots and the public policy levels. Their close connection with the target beneficiary population and strong grounding in community issues by virtue of their ongoing work with those communities makes them ideal policy advocates.” This unique position often leads NGOs to undertake public awareness campaigns, propose government policies, and lobby politicians. Such activities tend to be particularly successful when these organizations form horizontal ties with other NGOs.

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91 Ibid 242.

and jointly tackle political issues.93 NGOs may also influence governments through indirect means. Their positive experiences with development and popular participation may inspire public officials to modify the operation of government and improve their relationship with citizens.94 In addition, NGOs can democratize the informal political processes in countries by building stronger institutions, educating citizens and promoting micro-reform.95

Socio-political factors mediate the extent to which politically-engaged NGOs can affect the public sphere. Ewig argues that NGOs can help shape public policies and collaborate with government agencies so as to change the way the state delivers services only when government officials are open to these organizations and their intervention.96 Therefore, political opportunity is a critical factor in explaining the extent to which NGOs can contribute to democracy. Marsouk, Luong and Weinthal have shown that if a state limits or tries to control the activities of NGOs, these organizations will make little contribution to deepening democracy, even if they are actively engaged in the political sphere.97 Although Ho argues that “citizens are not stopped by state regulations” that seek to limit non-governmental and community-based organizations, he acknowledges

94 Clark, Democratizing Development, 65.
96 Ewig, “The Strengths and Limits of the NGOs Women’s Movement Model: Shaping Nicaragua’s Democratic Institutions.”
that they can be prevented from tackling the state through broad, nationally-based movements as a result of such restrictions.\textsuperscript{98} A state can also limit the extent to which an NGO can strengthen civil society. Mac Donald has shown that when governments encourage or complement the politically-focused work of NGOs, these organizations are better able to transfer democratic skills to and encourage political participation among target groups. When such support is unavailable, NGOs run the risk of creating a dependence on external assistance and reinforcing traditional, clientelist behavior among project beneficiaries.\textsuperscript{99} This does not mean that NGOs must operate under a friendly or liberal democratic government to contribute to civil society and democracy more generally. Such organizations can emerge and function successfully even in authoritarian systems and both promote democratic values and resist the state’s attempts to control their activities within such environments.\textsuperscript{100} However, the political system within which they operate, be it officially democratic or not, can help to either constrain or enable their work.

The literature on NGOs suggests that organizations that support grass-roots development can make a positive contribution to democracy. They help organize target groups, raise the socio-political awareness of participants, develop their leadership skills and encourage them to become politically active. Some NGOs further strengthen civil society by becoming active participants in politics. But an NGOs’ capacity to affect


\textsuperscript{99} Laura Mac Donald, \textit{Supporting Civil Society: The Political Role of Non Governmental Organizations in Central America} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

broad structures and policies is determined by political opportunity. They are most politically influential if the state either supports or at least does not interfere with their work.

**Theorizing Governance**

This dissertation will use the theoretical lens of governance to explore how a major natural disaster, international aid organizations and NGOs affected state-civil society relations in Honduras. Governance generally refers to the way states and societies interact in order to manage their public affairs. Historically, political governance has been viewed as a primacy of states or governments\(^{101}\) and has been associated with those actions that result in public policies. Recently, however, these assumptions have come into question.\(^{102}\) Scholars have recognized that states cannot and often do not determine socio-political outcomes and that important aspects of governance often exist outside of government.\(^{103}\) Scholars have also stopped associating governance with just policy and have begun analyzing also how states and their societies govern the regimes or institutions that constrain them.

Unfortunately, the literature on governance is far from consolidated. Different subfields of political science have adopted slightly different interpretations of this process. Public administration scholars tend to view governance as a process of steering

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\(^{103}\) James Rosenau, “Governance, Order and Change in World Politics,” 4.
or controlling public policy while students of international relations and comparative politics tend see it as the way state-society relations maintain and are affected by existing institutions. These different understandings of governance are not mutually exclusive, however. They merely reflect and are a response to the distinct theoretical concerns that have driven scholarship in these subfields.

The concept of governance arose in policy circles during the 1980’s as a result of previous disappointments with state reform. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, governments and international aid organizations had expressed an almost unwavering faith in the state’s ability to promote socio-economic development. As the limitations of this approach became evident, scholars and practitioners began proclaiming the failure of the welfare state in Europe and of state-led development in the Africa, Asia and Latin America. They suggested that downsizing governments and shifting some of the state’s previous responsibilities to the private sector could secure socio-economic and political goals more effectively. A new development discourse was needed to justify these neo-liberal policies and have them accepted by both governments and citizens. New theoretical constructs also had to be developed in order to better understand the socio-political repercussions of these policies. Governance was able to fill both of these needs.

International aid organizations began using the concept of governance in order to explain how public policies would have to be conducted in the context of neo-liberal economics and a smaller state. The World Bank described governance as “the manner in

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which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.”

It emphasized that the state was not the only actor responsible for this activity; governments, the private sector and civil society all had to participate in this process. In practice, however, the World Bank has treated the concept of governance as little more than government management. It has claimed that effective governance is based on technical expertise, effectiveness, accountability, rule of law and transparency. Political corruption has been described as its antithesis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has adopted a similar view of governance and focused its energy on improving government management of economic issues. NGOs have been encouraged to adopt a relatively minor or less powerful role in the management process—that of monitoring the activities of governments and holding them accountable for their actions. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also has emphasized that accountability and public participation are integral parts of good governance. However, this organization has de-emphasized the role of government and highlighted the position society plays in this process. It sees governance not merely as management, but as the way that societies distribute power to manage public resources and problems. It further defines the term as the way in “which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their

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differences.” Although the UNDP’s view of governance is more encompassing than that of the IMF and the World Bank, all of these institutions have used the term as a code word for government down-sizing, reform and privatization.

Unlike these development organizations, public policy and administration analysts turned to governance in order to study the way neo-liberalism had changed the nature of politics. European scholars observed that their political systems were less centralized and hierarchical during the 1990’s than they had been in the past. Not only were decisions being made in multiple, decentralized spheres of governing, but societal groups were having an increasingly important role in this process. Kooiman et al suggested that the concept of governance be used to describe the regularized patterns of interactions that emerge when public and private actors try to shape the political development of their societies. They argued that a governance approach to politics ceased associating needs with society and capacities with the state. Instead, it recognized that each of these groups had needs and capacities relevant to the other. Since the distinction between the state and society was increasingly indeterminate, Rhodes also suggested that the concept of networks be used to describe the interactions that arose between these two groups.


112 R.A.W. Rhodes, Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, and Accountability, 57.
Some public policy scholars argued that it was not enough to view governance as merely the negotiations or interactions among actors, as most of the policy literature was doing. March and Olsen asserted that governance also “involves affecting the framework within which citizens and [state] officials act and politics occurs.”\textsuperscript{113} They claimed that an analysis of democratic governance, their particular focus of study, requires “a discussion of how institutional frameworks can be organized to achieve democratic ideals and how institutions are constituted and changed within the processes they define.”\textsuperscript{114} Rhodes had also acknowledged, at least implicitly, that governance involves some degree of institutional maintenance for he had noted that state-society interactions are “regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.”\textsuperscript{115}

International relations scholars also emphasized the institutional aspects of governance. However, their interest in this derived not from the political changes associated with neo-liberalism but rather with those resulting from the collapse of communism. These scholars tried to explain why our world had not been thrown into disarray after the collapse of both a world hegemon and a bipolar world order. Their explanation was the emergence of world governance. Proponents of this view accept that interdependence is an increasing characteristic of our world and argue that this has helped create commonly accepted norms, rules and patterns of behavior that facilitate international cooperation.\textsuperscript{116} Consequently, they try to examine those factors that enable


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid

\textsuperscript{115} Rhodes, \textit{Understanding Governance}, 53.

agreement and collaboration to arise beyond the nation-state.\textsuperscript{117} While there is still some
disagreement in this subfield regarding what constitutes governance, most theorists have
defined it as either a system of rules (i.e., an institution) and/or as the act of managing
them. The latter one of these definitions has become increasingly popular in recent years.
Holsti, for example, describes governance as the authoritative and legitimate management
of the international system.\textsuperscript{118} Similarly, Young defines it as “the establishment and
operation of social institutions (in the sense of rules of the game that serve to define
practices, assign roles, and guide interactions among the occupants of these roles) capable
of resolving conflicts, facilitating cooperation or, more generally, alleviating collective-
action problems in a world of interdependent actors.”\textsuperscript{119}

Historically, international relation scholars have assumed that governance is a
process undertaken by governments.\textsuperscript{120} However, the recent literature on the subject has
emphasized that governance is more than just government.\textsuperscript{121} In other words, the order it
creates is not solely a product of state or government actions.\textsuperscript{122} Non state-actors also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Stoker, “Governance as Theory: Five Propositions,” 17.
\item \textsuperscript{121} For example see Meghnad Desai, “Global Governance,” 7; James Rosenau, “Governance, Order and Change in World Politics,” 4 and Smouts, “The Proper Use of Governance in International Relations,” 82.
\item \textsuperscript{121} James Rosenau, “Governance, Order and Change in World Politics,” 4.
\item \textsuperscript{122} See \textit{Global Governance: Ethics and Economics of the World Order} (London: Pinter, 1995).
\end{itemize}
play a significant role in this process. Wapner has argued that it is important to consider not only the actions of non-state actors when explaining the maintenance of institutions, but also their interactions within and across national boundaries.\textsuperscript{123} He along and other theorists have suggested that non-statal, transnational interactions create a “global civil society.”\textsuperscript{124} These can impact not only a state’s public policies, but also the policies pursued by international institutions.\textsuperscript{125} By emphasizing the domestic and international linkages between and among state and non-state actors, international relations theorists are implicitly or explicitly suggesting that governance is the creation and management of institutions \textit{by states and societies}.\textsuperscript{126}

Comparative politics scholars have adopted a similar view of governance. But, their interest in the subject originates from a different concern—the proliferation of democracy in the last quarter of the twentieth century, particularly after the demise of communism in Eastern Europe. While most of this subfield dedicated itself to exploring the factors that contribute to the establishment, consolidation and deepening of democracy, some African scholars cautioned that this scholarly focus was causing various political systems to be judged on the basis of Western norms and standards and that the democracy paradigm might be inappropriate for studying some regions of the world. They suggested that attention to governance would allow analysts to determine

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\item \textsuperscript{125} Robert O'Brien et al., \textit{Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{126} See Commission on Global Governance, \textit{Our Global Neighborhood} (Oxford University Press, 1995).
\end{itemize}
whether a regime was legitimate while avoiding the normative bias inherent in studies of democracy. Since these African specialists also were interested in explaining regime maintenance and change, they adopted an institutional view of governance. Hyden, one of the leading proponents of this approach, defined governance as “the conscious management of regime structures” by state-society interactions in order to increase the legitimacy of the public realm. “Its central concern,” according to Bratton and Rothchild, “is with the interactive processes of bargaining among actors in a state and society over the permissible limits of politics.” They further suggested that an analysis of governance must involve “an assessment of the capacities of contending parties to promote or block regime-altering reforms.”

As can be seen, each of these subfields of political science has adopted the concept of governance in order to explain different facets of political reality and address varying theoretical concerns. Nevertheless, they share some common views on the subject. All agree that governance is maintained by the interactions or relationship patterns between states and societies. Comparative politics and international relations scholars are interested in the way these actors manage political regimes. They acknowledge that although existing institutions constrain the nature of state-society relations, these actors can change the rules of the game as sometimes occurs during a regime transition. Policy

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130 Ibid
analysts and practitioners are less interested in regime change and management. They tend to view governance as the way state-society actors negotiate and arrive at policy decisions within given institutions. However, some policy scholars argue that in order to understand these decision-making processes, one must also evaluate the institutional frameworks within which they are made and the ways in which these can be altered. This dissertation accepts many of the insights offered by these varying approaches. Consequently, governance is understood here to be the way states and societies interact in order to manage their regimes and reach policy decisions within these mutually accepted rules of the game.

Hyden suggests that in order to study governance, one must analyze 1) how citizens participate in the political process, influence their political representatives and oversee their actions; 2) how political leaders respond to the demands of their constituents; and 3) whether citizens are equal participants in the political game.\textsuperscript{131} In addition, Rothchild suggests that one analyze the nature and intensity of the demands made by different actors on the political system.\textsuperscript{132} Unfortunately, few studies have tried to study these issues systematically. As a result, the literature on governance has been constrained to the level of theory and has been applied on rarely. This dissertation will contribute to this body of literature by presenting a case study analysis of governance.

Although theories of governance have been presented as an alternative to those on democracy, particularly by comparativists, the two approaches need not be antithetical. Their difference lies mostly in their focus. The democratization literature explores the

\textsuperscript{131} Goran Hyden, “Governance and the Study of Politics,” 14-16.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid
various factors that affect the performance and longevity of democracies. Consequently, scholars writing within this field tend to analyze how civil society, political elites and institutions affect these regimes. Unfortunately, they rarely explore how these three factors interact with one another.\footnote{One exception is Leonardo Morlino, Democracy Between Consolidation and Crisis: Parties, Groups and Citizens in Southern Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Morlino looks at how the relationship between elites and civil society affect the legitimacy and thus longevity of a democracy. Unfortunately, he focuses almost exclusively on how political parties mediate and represent citizen interests and ignores how other organized groups in society may do the same. Although this approach advances our understanding of how non-elite, political interactions impact democratization, it may be inappropriate for other newly democratic settings where parties fail to channel citizen demands.} Studies of governance, on the other hand, emphasize the relational aspect of a regime. They evaluate the nature of state-society interactions and then deduce the possible effects this may have on political institutions.

Although the concept of governance is related to that of democracy, the two should be viewed as distinct. A democracy is a type of political system characterized, among other things, by the presence of regular elections for choosing government officials. Although it is often assumed that those elected into office will make most or all of the relevant public decisions there, this is often not the case. Non-state actors frequently influence the policies that are developed in such systems as well as the institutions or rules of the game within which these are made. The more participatory a democracy becomes, the more societal groups affect this process. The concept of governance captures the behavioral dimension of democracy and the increasingly complex set of actors involved in decision-making there. This has led Hirst to suggest that his associative model of democracy is the one most compatible with the governance approach to politics because it emphasizes the ongoing communication between
governors and governed. Yet the applicability of governance is not limited to democracies. It can be used to analyze the relational processes that occur within any regime.

Democracies, when understood in their minimalist sense, may be sustained by various models of governance. The state-centered model is the most common and traditional form of governance. The state tends to dominate decision-making in these settings to the exclusion of most societal groups. Consequently, most policies and institutions are designed in an authoritarian, hierarchical and exclusionary manner. Although this style of governance may be present in a country that has adopted formal democratic structures (i.e., a constitution, elections, etc.), it is not compatible with a deeper or consolidated democracy because social actors generally are excluded from political participation and political elites remain unresponsive to them. This may limit the legitimacy of the regime and cause it to be unstable. Countries like Honduras that have recently made a transition to democracy tend to be characterized by this form of governance. At the other end of the spectrum lies the society-centered model of governance. In such settings, public decision-making occurs in diffuse nodes comprised of multiple societal actors. The state, though present, is too weak vis-à-vis society to perform key decision-making tasks. Although this style of governance is highly participatory, it too may be incompatible with democracy if the social groups who make most policy decisions are unknown or not accountable to voters. Moreover, these social actors may themselves be organized in a highly hierarchical and undemocratic manner.

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When taken to the extreme, this style of governance can breed political anarchy and destabilize a political regime. In between these two ideal-types lie various shades of governance. No one style of governance is compatible with all settings. Citizens and political elites must determine jointly the most appropriate form of governance for them. But for a democracy to be stable, a state and societal actors must cooperate with one another on an equal footing in order to manage their regime and public affairs. This suggests, as Hyden has noted, that the more governance is characterized by trust, reciprocity, authority and accountability, the more legitimate a political regime will be.\footnote{Hyden, “Governance and the Study of Politics.”}

Since the hierarchical or state-centered model of governance has been the traditional way of organizing and interpreting political relationships and continues to characterize many existing regimes, Pierre and Peters suggest that it be used as the benchmark against which newer, emerging models of governance should be assessed.\footnote{Pierre and Peters, Governance, Politics and the State, 14-18.} But the use of this model should not preclude an analysis of society. Indeed Peters argues that studies of governance should begin with a focus on society.\footnote{B. Guy Peters, “Governance and Comparative Politics,” Debating Governance: Authority, Steering and Democracy, ed. Jon Pierre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 49.} This is particularly critical in cases such as Honduras where civil society has traditionally been weak. One must approach a study of governance there by analyzing the strength of different social groups and the ways they are interacting with political elites (e.g., through confrontation, negotiation, clientelism, etc). Only then can one determine how society is challenging a hierarchical state and forcing it to open new channels of participation.
This dissertation acknowledges that governance occurs at multiple levels. In the international arena, it involves establishing and maintaining institutions or rules of the game that enable cooperation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. At a national level, it helps maintain constitutional laws and arrive at public decisions that are made within these legal parameters. Governance is also relevant at the subnational level. Citizens may negotiate with local government authorities the proper conduct of politics and may determine the types of policies that are to be implemented in their communities. Although the nature of governance in any one of these levels may impact what occurs in another, this need not always be the case. States and social actors may maintain distinct relationship patterns in different settings. For example, although civil society may play a prominent role in the maintenance of national, democratic institutions, they may be excluded from participating in key, decision-making processes at the local level. Such a scenario could lead to the partial consolidation of democracy.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed four seemingly distinct bodies of theory to see how they may inform our understanding of political change in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch. The literature on disasters suggests that crisis events can serve as catalysts for political transformation, but it fails to specify how this might occur. Although some studies have shown that pre-existing groups are strengthened and new ones emerge after a disaster, both tend to disappear once the emergency period has passed. Consequently, there is no

138 This point has been made by David Rothchild, “Conclusion: Management of Conflict in West Africa,” 197 Pierre and Peters, Governance, Politics and the State.

139 For a recent analysis of some of the problems associated with local governance see Mike Raco and John Flint, “Communities, places and Institutional Relations: Assessing the Role of Area-Based Community Representation in Local Governance,” Political Geography 20:5 (June 2001): 585-612.
strong evidence to show that disasters affect civil society. Nevertheless, mass-based
groups have arisen and become politically active in some countries during the years after
such a crisis. This suggests that other factors, not merely the experience of disaster, must
contribute to this development. Since bilateral, multilateral and NGO assistance often are
channeled to victims after a disaster, this chapter has explored how the presence of either
one of these can affect a socio-political environment. The literature on foreign aid notes
that donor countries and institutions often pressure aid-recipient governments to alter
existing political practices or structures by conditioning their aid and disseminating a
particular development discourse. NGOs may also affect socio-political processes at the
grass-roots level by encouraging target groups to organize and become more politically
active. When viewed together, these three bodies of literature suggest that bilateral and
multilateral donors may lead to political change through their effect on government while
disasters and NGOs may achieve the same by affecting the nature and activity of civil
society. In order to determine whether these changes arose in Honduras, this dissertation
has adopted the theoretical lens of governance. Governance theories assert that both state
and societal actors affect public policies and institutions. Thus an analysis of political
change, when approached from this perspective, must consider the nature of both of these
groups of actors and the pattern of interactions that exists between them. This theoretical
focus should reveal whether and how the experience of disaster and the advent of aid
affected the Honduran political system.
CHAPTER 3
A HISTORY OF HONDURAN GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Governance has been an elitist and state-centric process throughout most of Honduran history. Intra-elite bargaining, periodic civil wars and the economic influence of foreign interests determined political decision-making during the first century after independence. Honduran society remained atomized, unorganized and detached from politics during this period. Vibrant, mass-based, social organizations began to emerge during the mid-twentieth century and quickly challenged elite, political hegemony. Initially, these groups succeeded in obtaining some concessions from the state through intense public protest. However, they remained excluded from the decision-making process. As Honduran civil society developed, diversified and strengthened, its repertoire of demands grew to include calls for institutional change. The state and political elites reacted to this continual mass pressure through a variety of tactics, including acquiescence, cooptation, repression and the extension of political representation. Each of these responses impacted the strength and unity of civil society and their demand for greater political inclusion. This chapter traces the development of Honduran civil society, its participation in politics and the state’s responsiveness to it. It will end by discussing the nature of Honduran governance on the eve of Hurricane Mitch.

Early Civil Society

Honduran civil society remained atomized and undeveloped throughout most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The prevalence of small farm, subsistence-
oriented agricultural activities during this period kept most citizens isolated from each
other and more interested in survival than in socio-political issues. Caudillo politics and
occasional armed conflicts further discouraged social organization.¹ Unlike other Latin
American countries, Honduras’ wealthy and elite classes also remained divided.² This is
due to the fact that no bourgeoisie or significant landed oligarchy ever developed here.³
Elite families continued to engage in feudal economic activities much as they had during
colonial times and did not take advantage of the capitalist opportunities associated with
export-led growth.⁴ Although elites established some social clubs during the nineteenth
and early twentieth century,⁵ these were dedicated primarily to leisure activities and did
not encourage broader socio-political organization and mobilization.

The country’s first civil society groups emerged during the early twentieth century.
Mutual aid societies proliferated during the early 1900’s such that by 1927 approximately
twenty of them existed in the country. Most of these organizations were based in the
capital. None sought to vindicate workers’ rights or challenge the existing socio-political
structure. Members merely helped each other confront periods of personal crisis brought
on by illness, unemployment or death. More belligerent workers’ groups arose during
this time in the export-oriented, mining and banana enclaves that had been established in

¹ This view is also supported by Dario A. Euraque, Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870-1972 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 45
² Ibid 49.
Honduras at the end of the 1880’s. Employees of the Rosario Mining Company staged one of the country’s first strikes in 1909 in demand of higher wages. Although the movement was repressed and its participants jailed, miners continued to engage in similar acts of protest in 1912, 1932, 1947 and during the early 1950’s. Strikes first occurred in the Northern Coast banana plantations in 1916 and recurred thereafter with increasing frequency and worker participation. However, most of these labor activities remained isolated from each other.

Existing workers’ groups coalesced into two labor federations during the 1920’s. The Federación Obrera Hondureña (FOH, Honduran Workers’ Federation) was constituted in 1921 by twenty-five labor groups from both the Northern Coast and interior of the country. Initially, this organization was not very belligerent, and its leader was easily coopted by the Liberal Party during the 1926 municipal elections. This caused the more militant, Northern Coast labor unions who formed part of this federation to disassociate themselves from it and form the Federación de Sociedades Obreras del Norte in 1926. Three years later, they together with other dissident members of the FOH established the Federación Sindical Hondureña (FSH, Sindicated Workers’ Federation).

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This new labor federation was influenced by Communist ideology and led by Communist Party activists. The FOH, on the other hand, now mainly composed of groups from the interior of the country, came to be influenced by social democratic thinking. In 1931 its leaders founded the Socialist Revolutionary Party, an anti-Bolshevik group. Both the FOH and FSH sponsored several strikes during the 1920’s and early 1930’s in demand of national legislation to protect worker’s rights and better working conditions. The FSH also encouraged the formation of peasant leagues. All of this activity became possible, as Euraque has noted, because “labor agitators …at least until 1930, did not suffer the systematic repression from the state visited on labor elsewhere in Central America.”

Unfortunately, neither the FSH nor the FOH were able to achieve any long lasting benefits for their members. President Mejía Colindres (1928-1932) began repressing strikes along the Northern Coast in 1930. This state repression was heightened after 1932 when Tiburcio Carías came to power. By the 1940’s the FOH, FSH and peasant leagues that had been established during this period had ceased to exist. Its members either had been incarcerated, killed or exiled.

Female socio-political organization increased also during the early 1900’s. In 1913 a group of women formed the League of Central American National Defense to protest U.S. imperialist activities in the region. This group received so much support that it

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11 Mario Posas, *Breve historia de las organizaciones campesinas de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Estudio de Artes Gráficas, 19??):6-7


established a national and several municipal-level committees. Another group of women established a mutual aid society, the *Sociedad de Cultura Femenina* (Feminine Culture Society), in 1926. This group transcended its self-help orientation shortly after its founding and began organizing meetings that allowed women to discuss their country’s socio-political reality and the need to end both *caudillismo* and political violence. Some members became influenced by communist ideology. In 1929 the *Sociedad de Cultura Femenina* together with a few female labor unions that had been established during the same decade helped found the communist-inspired FSH. The First National Women’s Assembly was held the following year. Those present resolved to demand new laws that would protect female workers and join other laborers in the struggle for better working conditions.

Interestingly, these early women’s groups worked more in defense of labor rights than to secure female suffrage. Although their closeness to unions and leftist political organizations partly explains the former activity, their relative indifference to advancing women’s formal political incorporation seems curious. A handful of liberal-minded politicians had been arguing for the need to extend voting rights to women since 1894; yet, females showed little support for such measures during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Villars theorizes that women were uninspired to seek their own suffrage during this period because they associated voting with *caudillismo* and political violence.

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15 Villars, *Para la casa más que para el mundo*, chapter 3.

16 For a detailed discussion of the history of women’s suffrage in Honduras see Villars, *Para la casa más que para el mundo*. 
Rather than participate in these often chaotic events, women chose to secure political progress through other, peaceful forms of political activity.\textsuperscript{17}

Although women achieved a significant amount of organization during the 1920’s and 1930’s, the groups they established were short-lived and met with little political success. The \textit{Sociedad de Cultura Femenina} remained in existence for only seven years. Neither this nor any of the other female labor union in the country was able to pass any significant workers’ legislation during this period. Women’s groups either were branded as communist or were not taken seriously by most of the political establishment. When the state’s anti-labor repression increased during the 1930’s, women’s organizations fell into inactivity and eventually ceased to exist.

The \textit{Camara de Comercio e Industria de Tegucigalpa} (CCIT or Tegucigalpa’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry) was the only civil society group established during the early twentieth century that persisted beyond this period. The CCIT was organized due to state initiative, however, and not strong business organization. An incipient bourgeoisie class had begun to emerge in Honduras during the early twentieth century with the immigration of Christian Arabs (primarily Palestinians). Anti-immigrant legislation passed during the 1920’s and 1930’s had encouraged these foreigners to invest in new economic activities or face deportation.\textsuperscript{18} This legislation enabled Arabs to gain almost complete control of the growing import and export commercial sector and become an incipient bourgeoisie class.\textsuperscript{19} Despite their financial power, these immigrants were

\textsuperscript{17} Villars, \textit{Para la casa}, 226-231 and 402-408.


excluded from participating in Honduran high society\textsuperscript{20} and prohibited from engaging in political activities well into the 1940’s.\textsuperscript{21} During that decade, the relationship between Arabs and the state began to improve partly due to the monetary support some Arabs extended to President Carías and the personal relationship that they consequently established with him.\textsuperscript{22} In 1947 Carías passed legislation that created the CCIT. Initially, the CCIT was composed primarily of Arab businessmen; it was very conservative in orientation and easily manipulated by the state.\textsuperscript{23} As a result, it did not represent a significant counterweight to the state’s monopoly of governance. Moreover, the CCIT did not help extend the political rights of Arabs, its original constituents, nor unite business groups of different racial backgrounds during its first few years of existence. Business groups did not begin to organize and unite politically until the late 1950’s, and Arabs were not granted suffrage nor allowed more formal participation in the Honduran political system until the 1960’s.\textsuperscript{24} Despite its weak and state-initiated origin, the CCIT developed into an active, independent civil society group by the late 1950’s. It represents one of the first organizations to formally link the country’s bourgeoisie to the state.

As the first half of the twentieth century came to a close, Honduras had developed only a weak civil society. The few labor groups that had arisen during the 1910’s and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Euraque, \textit{Reinterpreting the Banana Republic} and Amaya, \textit{Los Árabes y Palestinos}, 88-91.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Some Arabs were granted citizenship directly by the executive before this time (See Amaya, \textit{Los Árabes y Palestinos}, 84-87). However, these opportunities were not extended to the Arab population in general.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Amaya, \textit{Los Árabes y Palestinos}, 96-101.
\item \textsuperscript{23} James Morris, “Interest Groups and Politics in Honduras,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1977, 76-77.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Amaya, \textit{Los Árabes y Palestinos}, 98.
\end{itemize}
1920’s had been repressed to the point of extinction. This violence also had weakened women’s groups who had maintained a close relationship with labor. The country’s elite classes had failed to form a unified group. The only business organizations that had been created arose due to state initiative and excluded most native Hondurans. The weakness of civil society during the first half of the twentieth century enabled the state, or rather, key individuals within the state, to dominate public decision-making. Although this style of governance would persist for several decades, the nature of state-society relations would begin to change during the 1950’s with the rise of new citizen groups willing to defend their rights and demand greater state responsiveness to them.

The Development of Civil Society (1950’s-1960’s)

The Honduran political landscape changed significantly with the end of Carías dictatorship and election of President Juan Manuel Gálvez in 1948. Citizens enjoyed greater associational freedom and both old and new political parties were (re)organized. By the 1950’s mass-based, citizen groups had gathered enough social capital to burst onto the political scene demanding more responsive state policies. Revived or newly-created political parties tried to tap into this political resource by further organizing popular groups, channeling their discontent and representing new citizen demands. Eventually, this invigorated civil society and more responsive political society gave birth to a new period of governance in Honduras—one in which social groups pressured the state more effectively than ever before, found greater political representation and sometimes succeeded in getting their demands met.

Women were among the first to organize and become politically active during the mid-20th century. Female residents from the capital established two political pressure groups in the early 1940’s: the Frente Femenil Pro-Legalidad (Female Pro-Legality...
Front) and the Comité Pro-Liberación de Presos Políticos (Committee Pro-Liberation of Political Prisoners). Members of both of these organizations were mainly wives of prominent Liberal Party leaders who had been jailed, exiled or otherwise persecuted during the Carías dictatorship.25 These Liberal Party sympathizers wrote petitions and staged street marches requesting the return of political exiles, the release of political prisoners, a free press, free elections and Carías’ resignation from office. The president responded to these protests by placing demonstrators under house arrest, cutting their homes’ water and electricity supply or imprisoning them.26 Although the women who participated in these events were not explicitly trying to secure their formal incorporation into national politics, their willingness to publicly criticize the government inadvertently advanced such a process.

While Honduran women were calling for democracy and greater political freedom on the streets of Tegucigalpa, international organizations were pressuring the government to extend female political participation. Inter-American organizations dedicated to promoting women’s suffrage established national chapters in Honduras during the early 1940’s. Female intellectuals as well as the wives of prominent politicians joined these groups and began publishing magazine articles on women’s right to vote. International pressure for women’s political rights was heightened at the end of this decade when the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man (1948) and Latin American states ratified the Convention on Women’s Political Rights (1948)—two documents that affirmed women’s right to vote. New Honduran political parties

25 Villars, Para la casa más que para el mundo, 309-312.

responded to this changing political climate by advocating female suffrage. The *Partido Democrático Revolucionario Hondureno* (PDRH or Honduran Revolutionary Democratic Party) was founded in 1946 from an anti-Carias movement that female organizations had initiated during the early part of that decade. The PDRH recognized women’s political contributions, partly owed its creation to it and hoped to benefit from their electoral strength. Existing women’s groups united in 1951 to form the *Federación de Asociaciones Femeninas de Honduras* (FAFH or Federation of Female Associations of Honduras). The FAFH eventually became the largest and most politically active women’s organization in the country. The FAFH held workshops and published educational material to raise consciousness among Honduran women on their political rights. They also lobbied the government and several political leaders for new legislation granting female suffrage. The Honduran National Congress finally acceded to their demands in 1954.\(^{27}\) Although this legislation was never signed into law by a democratically-elected president, Julio Lozano Díaz respected the spirit of this legislation by granting women suffrage in 1955 through Decree Law #29.\(^{28}\)

Student groups also become more politically active during the 1950’s. A student government association, the *Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios de Honduras*

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\(^{27}\) Before the executive could sign this legislation into law, the country entered a political crisis. Presidential elections were held late in 1954 and no candidate obtained a majority of the votes cast. Liberal Villeda Morales who garnered a plurality of the votes, had declared his commitment to female suffrage. This political stance was undoubtedly influenced by his wife who had been an activists in the FAFH. Since the newly elected congress would not agree to nominate Villeda or any other candidate as the new president, Vice President Lozano Díaz declared himself the de facto head of state. Lozano’s wife was also a member of FAFH and pressured him to extend the vote to women. Since the constitutional order had been disrupted, Lozano Díaz could not approve Congress’s recent law extending female suffrage. Therefore, he legalized women’s electoral participation through decree law #29 in 1955.

\(^{28}\) The information reported in this paragraph is derived from Villars, *Para la casa más que para el mundo*, chapters 4 and 5 and an interview with María Elbina Elvir, FAFH president, November 2, 2000.
had existed since the first half of the twentieth century in order to represent the interests of those enrolled in the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* (UNAH). Initially, the FEUH limited its activities to the university setting and to matters involving the student body. However, this began to change during the 1950’s. The FEUH began publishing a humorist newspaper in 1956 that sharply criticized the Lozano Díaz government. Lozano responded by shutting down the paper and exiling several student leaders. University students organized a massive street march to protest this event and demand an end to the Lozano dictatorship. Although the march was repressed, students were unabated. A few months after the march FEUH members together with a faction of the military sympathetic to their cause took over an army barrack in the heart of Tegucigalpa. Troops loyal to the president quickly put down the insurrection and arrested its participants. But this only postponed the inevitable: Lozano Díaz was deposed by a military coup just a few months later. The 1956 coup against Lozano Díaz as well as the rise in military tensions with Nicaragua during the following year helped rally student support for the military junta. In April 1957 FEUH even organized a meeting headed by members of the military in order to raise nationalist sentiments and increase student enlistment in the armed forces. But university student support for the military was short-lived. In 1959 university students together with members of the Liberal Party took up arms in order to defend reformist President Villeda Morales against

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an attempted military coup.\textsuperscript{32} By then, the FEUH had come to be controlled by a new, Marxist student front known as the \textit{Frente de Reforma Universitaria} (FRU). Non-Marxists groups inspired by either the right-wing of the Nationalist Party or by Social Christian doctrine had also been formed in 1958 and 1959 in order to vie for control of the FEUH.\textsuperscript{33} This further politicized the university student body and increased the FEUH’s involvement in broader national politics. These student groups would give rise to a broader Social Christian movement in Honduras and to the establishment of the Christian Democratic Party during the 1960’s. They would also become active in supporting the organization and political activity of new labor and peasant groups.

While females organized through the FAFH and university students increased their political activity, workers had begun reorganizing throughout Honduras. The Gálvez administration (1948-1954) had allowed labor groups to emerge in the interior of the country and form a broad coalition, the \textit{Comité Coordinador Obrero} (Workers’ Coordinating Committee), in 1950. This organization began publishing a newspaper that spoke of the need for new labor laws, free unions and a social security system. Not all labor groups were permitted such freedom of speech and association, however. Workers organizations from the Northern Coast banana plantations, the mining sector and other capitalist enterprises continued to be repressed during the Gálvez administration. Foreign owned companies either used private armed guards to squash incipient labor unions or easily influenced local police units and military bodies within the still fragmented state to


assist them in this process. President Galvéz, a former United Fruit Company lawyer, either condoned or did nothing to end these abuses. Despite this labor repression, workers outside the capital continued to organize. A handful of leaders tried educating workers on their rights and succeeded in establishing a few, clandestine, labor groups during this period.34

Worker discontent erupted in a massive strike in 1954.35 The protest originated with workers of the Tela Railroad Company, a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company (UFCO), who were being forced to work on holidays but not being paid extra for their labor. The strike opened a flood gate of worker discontent. Protesters demanded better working conditions, a wage increase, double pay for work on Sundays and holidays, the right to unionize and national labor legislation. Within three days the strike had spread to all of UFCO’s 25,000 employees. A few days later the 10,000 workers from the Standard Fruit Company (SFCO) joined the struggle, effectively bringing most of the North Coast to a standstill. Workers’ from other parts of the country joined the strike soon thereafter. Small business owners, teachers, women’s organizations and student groups expressed their solidarity with the movement through their moral and financial support. The PDRH and recently reorganized Communist Party played a key role in encouraging this national strike. Mainstream political parties, on the other hand, initially reacted both negatively

34 Posas, Luchas del movimiento obrero Hondureño, 48-54, 123-129 and 134-142.

and defensively to this protest. Since 1954 was an election year, Nationalist President Gálvez did not respond to this popular movement with the same level of repression that he had used against labor in the past. However, he did use state force to replace the members of the combative Comité Central de Huelga (Central Strike Committee) with a more conciliatory group of leaders. President Gálvez then mediated negotiations between the Comité Central de Huelga and company executives, effectively bringing an end to the strike after sixty-nine days of protest. Employers agreed to increase workers salaries by 10-15% (not the 50% that had been requested), improve working conditions and cede other concessions. Meanwhile, President Gálvez agreed to create a Ministry of Labor and grant workers the right to organize.

Northern Coast laborers were among the first to unionize. SFCO and Tela Railroad Company workers established two separate unions just months after the 1954 strike’s end: the Sindicato de los Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company (SITRATERCO) and the Sindicato de los Trabajadores de la Standard Fruit Company (SITRAFRUSCO). The SITRATERCO was organized and its leadership trained with the assistance of the American Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO) and the Inter-American Regional Labor Organization (Organización Regional Interamericana del Trabajadores, ORIT). The U.S. government influenced these foreign labor organizations. They, therefore, tried steering Honduran labor groups away from communist ideas and teaching them how to work within existing political and socio-economic structures. As a result of such training, the SITRATERCO limited its struggle to obtaining moderate economic and social benefits for its members.36 The SITRAFRUSCO, on the other hand, was

influenced by communist ideology and was more belligerent in demanding workers’ rights. The state responded very differently to these two organizations. The leaders of the SITRATERCO were offered training, U.S. backed housing loans and posts as congressional deputies while those of the SITRAFRUSCO were beaten, imprisoned periodically and some even killed.37 Despite their differing ideologies and relationship with the state, these two unions joined together towards the end of 1954 in order to form the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Norteños de Honduras, (FESITRANH or Honduran Syndicated Federation of North Coast Workers). Twenty-five additional labor unions joined this federation by 1963 effectively bringing all workers from the Northern Coast banana plantations under one organization.38 The FESITRANH soon became the strongest labor federation in the country. Like the SITRATERCO, the FESITRANH received significant support from the AFL-CIO and the ORIT. However, it did not force a particular ideological orientation on its member unions and tolerated significant diversity.

Although the 1954 strike had originated and most impacted North Coast workers, laborers elsewhere in the country benefited from its occurrence. New unions emerged in the central and southern part of Honduras during the later half of the 1950’s. These represented a variety of smaller business sectors: construction workers, mechanics,
tailors, shoemakers, theater workers, etc. Those unions based primarily in the capital formed the Federación de Sindicatos del Centro de Honduras (Federation of Syndicates from the Center of Honduras) in 1958. The federation demanded a Labor Code, the observance of a minimum wage law, the right to strike and social benefits for workers. Although state-centered, political elites had liberalized significantly from the preceding decades, they were unprepared to accept such demands. Some politicians and business leaders began accusing members of the Federación de Sindicatos del Centro of being communists. Although President Villeda Morales showed a willingness to work with organized labor groups and respond to some of their demands, he simultaneously wanted to purge them of any communist ideological influences.\(^3^9\) Rather than use violence to achieve this goal, as some of his predecessor had done, Villeda passed anticommunist legislation and encouraged the ORIT to work with Honduran labor unions in order to prevent their radicalization.\(^4^0\) By the end of 1958 the state’s and ORIT’s efforts led to the creation of a parallel labor federation in the interior of the country: the Federación Central de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Libres de Honduras (FECESITLIH or Central Federation of Free Workers’ Syndicates).\(^4^1\) The FECESITLIH united all labor unions from the interior of Honduras except those suspected of having a communist orientation. The FECESITLIH was relatively docile and non-confrontational with the state during its first years of existence. Moreover, its creation weakened the internally divided

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\(^3^9\) Villeda Morales passed several anticommunist laws in order to prevent the radicalization of the Honduran labor force.

\(^4^0\) Posas, Lucha ideológica y organización sindical, 33-36.

\(^4^1\) Meza, Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño, 111.
Federación de Sindicatos del Centro and helped assure its quick demise. However, the FECESITLIH did not go unchallenged for long.

The Federación Auténtica Sindical de Honduras (FASH of Authentic Federation of Honduran Syndicates) was established in 1963 by a group of unions dissatisfied with the government friendly and ORIT-oriented FECESITLIH. The FASH was influenced by Social Christian doctrine. It was also less docile and less susceptible to government cooption than the FECESITLIH and directly challenged the later group’s hegemony of working class groups in the interior of the Honduras. However, it shared the FECESITLIH’s concern for containing the spread of communism among working class groups.\(^{42}\) The FASH quickly spread to the Southern part of Honduras where it built on the Catholic Church’s radio schools and community building activities which had been ongoing since the 1950’s in order to organize both labor and peasant groups.\(^{43}\)

Less than a decade after the 1954 national strike, Honduran workers from all parts of the country had united to form local and regional level syndicates. By the 1960’s Honduras had the largest number of unionized workers in all of Central America.\(^{44}\) Organized labor became such a significant political force in the country by 1959 that the government of Villeda Morales was forced to placate their demands by creating a Social Security System and passing both a Collective Bargaining Law and the country’s first Labor Code.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{43}\) White, “Structural Factors in Rural Development.”


\(^{45}\) Natalini de Castro et al., *Significado histórico*, 103-109.
Initially, business leaders remained atomized and politically inactive relative to labor's growing strength. Political elites within the state were forced to seek out business leaders and obtain their opinion on certain issues. In 1957, for example, the recently installed military junta instructed the National Election Council to incorporate people appointed by the commercial, industrial, agricultural and cattlemen associations into its membership. That same year, the Constituent Assembly consulted members of these same groups on the government’s economic policy.46 Encouraged by this political opening, business leaders and large landowners began establishing formal organizations that could both coalesce and represent their interests before the state as well as counter workers’ demands. Landed elites formed the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Honduras (ANAGH or National Association of Agricultural Workers and Cattlemen) in 1957. That same year Northern Coast businessmen formed a regional chamber of commerce, the Camara de Comercio e Industria de Cortés (CCIC), in 1957. The CCIC was more progressive and less prone to comply with government directives than the CCIT, the chamber of commerce established by Carías. The country’s industrialists also coalesced in 1958 to form the Asociación Nacional de Industriales (ANDI or National Association of Industrialists). Although ANAGH dissolved within three years of its creation, ANDI, CCIC and CCIT quickly grew in political strength and activity. All of these business groups expressed their opposition to the 1959 Labor Code. Although they did not prevent the law’s passage, they were able to eliminate those

clauses that they deemed most harmful to their interests and thus counter labor demands.47

The labor organizations that arose within Honduran capitalist enclaves during the 1950’s spread to the agrarian sector of the country the following decade and directly contributed to the rise of peasant associations. The origins of the country’s first peasant groups can be traced to the massive layoffs of UFCO and SFCO workers during the late 1950’s. Just two months after the 1954 national strike had been concluded, a hurricane ravished the Northern Coast of Honduras, destroying most banana plantations there. Foreign fruit companies claimed that they could not bear the costs of both the disaster and recent labor concessions. They responded to both events by laying-off thousands of employees. By 1959 UFCO and SFCO employed less than half of the workers they had had in 1953.48 The companies used this post-hurricane labor restructuring as an excuse to dismiss its most militant and leftist labor leaders. Although these layoffs had the immediate effect of reducing the numerical strength and militancy of the Honduran labor movement, it inadvertently spread popular unrest to the countryside. Landless and unemployed, former banana company workers tapped into their public protest and union forming experience in order to organize peasant groups that could pressure the government for farmland. Communist-leaning, former strike leaders established the Comité Central de Unificación Campesina (CCUC or Central Committee for Peasant Union) in 1959. The group began occupying lands that had been abandoned by Northern

47 Morris, “Interest Groups and Politics,” 76-79; Posas and del Cid, La construcción del sector público, 119 and Natalini de Castro et al., Significado histórico, 103-109.

48 Euraque, Reinterpreting the Banana Republic, 102; Posas, Lucha ideológica y organización sindical, 9; and Meza, Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño, 97.
Coast businesses during preceding years. The CCUC was transformed into the *Federación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras* (FENACH or National Federation of Honduran Peasants) in 1962. Like its predecessor, FENACH had a Communist orientation and was very critical of existing land tenure relations in Honduras. It took much of its inspiration from the still recent Cuban Revolution and quickly grew to represent approximately 15,000 members.\(^{49}\)

The Villeda Morales government responded to FENACH’s creation by encouraging the establishment of a new, anti-communist peasant group: the *Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras* (ANACH or National Association of Honduran Peasants). ANACH was created towards the end of 1962 as a result of the top-down organizing work of the FESITRANH, the AFL-CIO and ORIT.\(^{50}\) It also received support from the United States Agency of International Development (USAID).\(^{51}\) The group tried to contain both the proliferation of communism and radicalization of unemployed and landless agricultural workers in Honduras. Initially, ANACH was little more than an appendage of the FESITRANH. The later group curtailed any independent or innovative steps that the former undertook. During the late 1960’s, for example, ANACH leaders began establishing a close relationship with university professors and students in the hopes that these could counsel them on agrarian issues. These measures were quickly


\(^{51}\) White, “Structural Factors in Rural Development,” 177.
labeled as leftist by the FESITRANH’s leadership. ANACH’s executive committee was forcefully replaced, and all relations with the university were discontinued.52

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church encouraged the organization of peasant groups in the Southern part of the country. The Catholic Church had initiated a radio school program and begun training lay spiritual leaders (i.e., Delegates of the Word) here during the 1950s. Initially, these activities were undertaken in order to increase the Catholic Church’s presence in rural communities, deepen people’s Catholic faith and contain the spread of both Protestantism and Communism. In order to achieve the later, the Catholic Church encouraged the faithful to organize peasant leagues, women’s clubs and other self-help groups that could address the existing social problems in the country.53 But these grass-roots organizations were unable to confront the dramatic increase in landlessness caused by the state-sponsored expansion of non-traditional exports in the South during the 1950’s and 1960’s.54 Some peasants responded to these events by occupying privately-held properties and negotiating better land access with the national government. Although some peasants from Southern Honduras were granted provisional land titles as a result of this activity, they were unable to secure broader gains for the


peasant population in their area.\textsuperscript{55} The FASH, the country’s first Social Christian labor organization, together with several Catholic-inspired community groups began organizing landless peasants here more formally during the early 1960’s in order to better represent peasant needs before the state.\textsuperscript{56} Their actions helped give rise to a third Honduran peasant group, the \textit{Asociación Campesina Social Cristiana de Honduras} (ACASCH or Social Christian Peasant Association of Honduras) in 1962. ANACH was renamed twice until it adopted the present title of \textit{Unión Nacional Campesina} (UNC or National Peasant Union) in 1970.\textsuperscript{57} Unlike the regionally-based.

Villeda Morales tried to contain peasant militancy as well as respond to their demands by promulgating the country’s first agrarian reform law in 1962. The law created the \textit{Instituto Nacional Agrario} (INA or National Agrarian Institute) and gave the state the authority to expropriate unused national, \textit{ejidal}\textsuperscript{58} or private property and redistribute it to \textit{individual}, landless peasants. Despite its stated objective, this agrarian reform law did relatively little to alleviate peasant land pressure. In 1965 about a quarter of Honduras’ rural population (over 63,000 families) was landless.\textsuperscript{59} Yet the state redistributed land to less than 9000 families during the ten years that the 1962 agrarian

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Posas, \textit{Breve historia de las organizaciones campesinas}, 16-17; Meza, \textit{Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño}, 121; and Morris, “Interest Group Politics,” 149.
\item There is some disagreement about precisely when the UNC was founded. All agree that the group emerged sometime between 1969 and 1972. See Posas, \textit{Breve historia de las organizaciones campesinas}, 16-17.
\item \textit{Ejidal} lands are held in common by towns or villages.
\end{itemize}
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reform law was in effect. However, this legislation did encourage reform beneficiaries to organize further. Seventy-six cooperatives with a total of 3504 members were established from 1962 to 1972. These coalesced into a national level *Federación de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria de Honduras* (FECORAH or Federation of the Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Honduras) in 1972. By the following year over 100,000 peasants were organized in the country.

Conservative groups viewed the increasing organization and militancy of both peasant and labor groups with much trepidation. Although Villeda Morales had tried to weaken leftist organizations and control popular discontent by implementing a few social reforms, conservative groups considered his tactics to be insufficient. Popular-based groups were becoming more politically influential, and they seemed sure to tilt the outcome of the 1964 election in their favor. It seemed unlikely that a conservative presidential candidate would be able to gain control of government through electoral means. This state of affairs encouraged the Honduran Armed Forces to depose Villeda Morales at the end of his term in office and prevent upcoming general elections.

The 1963 military coup should be understood as a conservative reaction to increasing student, labor and peasant activism during the preceding decade. It was followed by a major crackdown on recently formed, popular organizations. The leftist peasant group, FENACH, was brutally repressed and effectively destroyed. Agrarian

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60 Instituto Nacional Agrario (INA), *Resumen básico de los grupos campesinos beneficiarios de la reforma agraria*, (Tegucugalpa: INA, 1985): 5

61 Ibid.


reform practically ground to a halt and peasant activism entered a period of inertia. Leaders of the communist inspired SITRAFRUSCO were forcefully replaced with conservative leaders while some of its rank and file members were imprisoned in order to discourage their militant activities.

In spite of this persecution, mass-based organizations formed an even stronger union and began challenging military rule. The SITRAFRUSCO, though temporarily demobilized, did not fall into inactivity. The group continued to fight for labor rights and even expanded its membership in 1964 by incorporating employees of SFCO’s port and railroad facilities. The new organization, the Sindicato Unificado de Trabajadores de la Standard Fruit Company (SUTRASFCO), represented over 3600 workers and became more militant and leftist than in the past. The FECESITLIH, the relatively passive labor union that had been formed in the interior of the country with the state’s encouragement, began demanding a series of socio-economic reforms, the release of political prisoners and the return of political exiles. This echoed the Liberal Party’s condemnation of the armed forces’ unconstitutional rise to power. The FECESITLIH also sponsored a general strike in 1965 demanding that the military government respect and apply existing labor laws. The march was dissolved and the federation’s leaders were forcefully replaced by the Manch Brava, a paramilitary group associated with the Nationalist Party. But other mass-based groups continued to demand political change. Two Northern Coast labor groups, the FESITRANH and SITRATERCO, called for a

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65 Euraque, Reinterpreting the Banana Republic, 125.
66 Posas and del Cid, La construcción del sector público, 132-133 and Posas, Lucha ideológica y organización sindical, 47.
return to constitutional rule and the establishment of a unity government. These groups further asked that they be granted direct representation in the new, civilian government. The military initially ignored these petitions but finally agreed to schedule elections for the end of 1965.

The increasing organization and mobilization of both labor and peasant groups encouraged Honduras’ business and landed elite to unite further. As was mentioned earlier, large-scale farmers and cattlemen had tried uniting their interest in 1957 through the creation of ANAGH, but the group dissolved after only three years of existence. The increasing incidence of land invasions and organization of peasant groups encouraged this conservative class to reorganize again into the Federación Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Honduras (FENAGH or National Federation of Agricultural Workers and Cattlemen) in 1966. The following year, the CCIC suggested that FENAGH unite with the business and industrial groups in the country to form a single organization that could represent their joint political needs before the state. This peak business organization was established in 1967 under the name of Corporación Hondureña de la Empresa Privada (COHEP or Honduran Private Enterprise Corporation).

As the preceding section reveals, Honduran civil society organized, became politically active and gained considerable concessions from the state during the 1950’s and early 1960’s. However, the right of association continued to be curtailed as the state periodically destroyed communist-inspired organizations and encouraged the formation of more conciliatory ones. Despite a general political opening, civil society groups were unable to establish permanent dialog channels with the state or significantly alter the

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67 Funes, Los deliberantes, 241-242 and Meza, Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño, 126-127.
nature of governance. When state-centered political elites granted political concessions during this period, they did so in order to appease mobilized groups and secure their support. This pattern of governance would not be altered significantly until civil society reached a more mature level of development in succeeding decades.

**The Growing Strength of Civil Society (1965-1974)**

Honduran civil society became more unified and politically active during the mid to late 1960’s. The pending return to constitutional rule in 1965 and continued abuses by the military encouraged civil society groups to join with groups outside their sector in order to maintain a constant and heightened level of political pressure on the government. Unlike the previous decade, mass-based groups were no longer asking for the mere vindication of their specific group rights, but for a more profound, socio-political restructuring of society. Civil society’s new belligerence eventually enabled it to push for the creation of a National Unity Government. When this government failed to respond to needs or demands of organized groups, these called upon the military to intervene in the political process. The military responded not by repressing mass based groups, as it had done in the past, but by heralding a new phase of state-civil society relations in Honduras: a period of populist military rule.

Peasant and labor groups began uniting across their respective sectors during the 1960’s in order to form stronger, mass based groups. The peasant group ANACH united with two labor federations—the FESITRANH and FECESITLIH—in 1964 to establish the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras* (CTH or Confederation of Honduran Workers). Like its members, the CTH was anti-communist in orientation and influenced by both the ORIT and the AFL-CIO. This together with the organization’s numerical strength encouraged state centered elites to be responsive to the CTH and dialog with its
leaders. The two labor federations from Southern Honduras, the FASH and FESISUR, united with the UNC, one peasant group that existed in the same region to establish the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT or General Workers Confederation) in 1970. The CGT was inspired by Social Christian doctrine and maintained a close relationship with both the Catholic Church and the newly formed Christian Democratic Party. The CGT was more inclined to challenge the state and existing socio-economic structures than the CTH.\(^{68}\) Consequently, the state tried to limit its strength and ability to obtain credit by not granting it legal recognition until the 1980’s.\(^{69}\)

Student groups, labor unions, peasant organization and political parties coalesced in January 1965 to form the *Comité Civico Nacional* (National Civic Committee). This broad-based organization demanded an end to the military’s arbitrary attacks on citizens and sought to ensure that the constituent assembly to be elected in February 1965 would establish the proper basis for a democratic government. Although the *Comité Civico Nacional* was short lived, it led to two significant accomplishments. First, it assured that there was a return to constitutional rule. Second, it inspired the newly elected government to grant civil society groups representation in the *Consejo Superior de Planificación Económica* (CONSUPLANE or Superior National Council of Economic Planning), a government agency founded in 1965.\(^{70}\)

The 1965 Constituent Assembly elections were characterized by violence and significant voter fraud. This enabled the head of the armed forces, Gen. Walter López

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\(^{68}\) Morris, “Interest Groups and Politics,” 167.


Arellano, to place conservative supporters in the Assembly and retain his control of the executive. Initially, few Liberal Party and civil society leaders protested these events. But discontent over the country’s political situation erupted into political action after the 1968 Municipal elections. Fraud and voting irregularities had allowed the Nationalist Party to secure 235 of the 260 mayoral seats in the country during this later election. Labor unions and business groups jointly denounced these events. This represented the first time any civil society organization had protested an election in Honduras. Initially, Gen. López Arellano ignored these complaints. But labor unions and business groups persisted. They requested a “civic dialogue” between themselves, the government and the armed forces in order to discuss how the constitution could be guaranteed. The requested meeting was held on April 1968. Civil society leaders used this opportunity to express their concerns and needs to the president and to request participation in the government’s policy-making process. Initially, their petition was denied. Three days later, as if to remind politicians of the mass following they commanded, 10,000 workers affiliated with the SITRATERCO participated in a street march to commemorate el Día del Trabajo (Labor Day). Union leaders used this public display of power to declare that their organization would no longer allow “Honduran-style” elections to take place. In order to appease the masses, President López Arellano sought to reach a compromise with the Liberal Party regarding the 1968 municipal election. The Liberal Party settled for nothing less than its nullification. President López Arellano would not accede. Talks between the government and opposition groups reached a stand still. Organized labor

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responded by having its representative withdraw from the government’s Superior Planning Council of which it had formed a part since 1967.\textsuperscript{72}

Later that year a new problem emerged. The Honduran National Congress ratified the Protocol of San José, a Central American Common Market (CACM) agreement designed to limit imports from outside of this regional trading block. The agreement would have imposed taxes of 10-20\% on food imports and of 20-30\% on non-durable good imports. It also would have reduced the supply of commercial credit. Businesses and labor groups from the Northern Coast of Honduras united once again to express their opposition to these levies. The twenty-two labor unions associated with the FESITRANH went on strike while Northern businesses closed their operations in protest. The government responded by declaring a thirty day state of siege. Those newspapers and radio stations that sympathized with the protesters were shut down. Strike leaders and participants were imprisoned, and businesses were forced to reopen at gun point.\textsuperscript{73}

Although the movement was repressed, organized groups in the country did not cease expressing their discontent with the López Arellano regime.\textsuperscript{74} The CCIC continued to challenge the existing political system. In addition, over 40,000 workers took to the streets in 1969 demanding a series of political reforms and the establishment of a new, unity government. Their petitions were backed by the major labor unions, peasant groups


\textsuperscript{74} Euraque, \textit{Reinterpreting the Banana Republic}, 135.
and business associations in the country. These events convinced both politicians and the military alike that they needed to respond to civil society’s demands in order to gain legitimacy.\textsuperscript{75}

The 1969 war between Honduras and El Salvador temporarily shifted popular attention away from domestic concerns as organized groups rallied behind President López Arellano in a show of nationalist support.\textsuperscript{76} But this climate of national unity also was used by civil society groups to maintain a broad-based coalition that could more forcefully pressure for a stable and truly democratic government.\textsuperscript{77} In October 1969 the business group COHEP sponsored a reunion of civil society groups who together designed a Plan of National Unity. The pact proposed that a single-apolitical presidential candidate be chosen and that the two major parties in the country equally divide seats in the congress and bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{78} They also requested that the Armed Forces be the guarantors and enforcers of this accord. The National and Liberal parties refused to accept the proposal, insisting that the head of state and the members of the national congress should be chosen by the electorate via competitive elections. However, the parties did agree to share political power with the opposition and to realize the demands that leading civil society groups had been making during the preceding six years. The

\textsuperscript{75} Leiva Vivas, \textit{Un país en Honduras} and Posas and del Cid, \textit{La construcción del sector público}, 142-160; and d’Ans, \textit{Emergencia difícil de una nación}, 223-224.

\textsuperscript{76} d’Ans, \textit{Emergencia difícil de una nación}, 225-226; Posas and del Cid, \textit{La construcción del sector público}, 171-173; and Euraque, \textit{Reinterpreting the Banana Republic}, 137-140.

\textsuperscript{77} Meza, \textit{Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño}, 139.

\textsuperscript{78} Funes, \textit{Los deliberantes}, 261-264.
1971 election allowed Nationalists to retain control of congress by a small margin and name the country’s new President, Ernesto Cruz Uclés.  

The National Unity government took office amidst a plethora of popular demands. Labor unions wanted a minimum wage law, a revision of foreign-controlled monopolies, the establishment of mixed public and private owned enterprises and new state owned companies. Peasants asked that the 1962 agrarian reform law to be reactivated while business groups wanted the state to foment industrialization by aiding nascent industries. Since few dialogue channels existed at the time between these civil society groups and the state, popular sectors expressed their demands through public marches and land invasions. This popular mobilization began to divide the recently formed union between business and mass based groups. FENAGH, the group of landed elites that formed part of COHEP, responded to the increasing number of land invasions in the country by boycotting agriculture and livestock activities. The National Unity government was unable to respond to these developments and helped create an increasingly unstable political situation. ORIT-supported labor and peasant groups began calling for a review of the National Unity Plan in mid-1972. The military, CTH and COHEP sponsored several meetings to encourage and help the two ruling parties settle their political differences, but partisan non-cooperation continued. Meanwhile, civil society groups continued to place demands on the government and protest the political impasse in the country. The ANACH threatened the Cruz government with a national hunger march if it did not develop an agrarian policy and dismiss the existing INA director. At the same time...
time, the SITRATERCO and the FESITRANH promised to launch a general strike in solidarity. Neither of these protest events ever took place.\textsuperscript{80}

After a year and a half of political inactivity and stalemate, the guarantors of the National Unity Plan, the Honduran military, deposed the Cruz government and promised to achieve a true national unity by meeting popular demands. Gen. López Arellano, the new head of state, dramatically altered his earlier stance towards mass-based groups. Rather than repress them, as he had done a few years earlier, he now chose to garner their support by acceding to their demands. Just days after the 1972 coup, Gen. López Arellano emitted Decree Law #8 which enabled the National Agrarian Institute to grant peasants temporary usufruct rights to national and ejidal lands and force private landowners to rent their unused property for a two year period. This gave 21,518 families immediate access to land\textsuperscript{81} and placated rural unrest. Members of the anti-communist ANACH were the main beneficiaries of this land adjudication.\textsuperscript{82} A new agrarian reform law was instituted in 1975; it proposed distributing 600,000 hectares of public or unused private lands to 120,000 peasant families with little (less than five hectares) or no land.\textsuperscript{83} Although the government never achieved the goal set forth in this law, it did take aggressive steps during the mid-1970’s to redistribute land.\textsuperscript{84} It also


\textsuperscript{81} Instituto Nacional Agrario (INA), PROCCARA 46 Meses (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1978): III-6.

\textsuperscript{82} INA, PROCCARA 46 Meses, III-16 and Sieder, “Honduras: The Politics of Exception,” 120.


\textsuperscript{84} Instituto Nacional Agrario (INA), Resumen básico de los grupos campesinos beneficiarios de la reforma agraria (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1985): 5-6.
challenged the monopoly of multinational fruit companies by expropriating over 140,000 hectares of their unused landholdings and doubling banana export taxes from twenty five to fifty cents per every forty pound box. Gen. López Arellano appeased labor demands by instituting a minimum wage law in 1974. He also garnered union support through Decree Law #30, which required individuals to contribute dues to unions that protected their interests whether or not they were members of them. The CTH had been petitioning for such a law since 1965. The new military government also took steps to protect the country’s nascent industrial sector. It restored the exemptions and import privileges that had been removed by the San José Protocol and created two new state agencies to promote domestic businesses: the Corporación Nacional de Inversiones (CONADI or National Investment Corporation) was to distribute state-funded loans to the business sector, and the Instituto de Fomento Profesional (INFOP or Institute for Professional Development) was to enhance the technical and vocational skills of workers.

The immediate effect of these policies was to garner popular organized support for the new, reformist military government. The ORIT-backed labor and peasant groups were most supportive of Gen. López Arellano. This was most clearly evidenced by a 100,000 member march they sponsored in January 1974 to express their approval of the government’s proposed National Development Plan. The Christian Democratic UNC and CGT, though often critical of the new regime, also offered it their tenuous support.

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85 Originally the new military government had decided to raise this export tax to $1 for every forty pound box of bananas. However, the multinational corporations operating in the country purportedly bribed senior level government officials (possibly López Arellano himself) to reduce the tax to fifty cents a box.


87 Becerra, Evolución histórica de Honduras, 204 and d’Ans, Emergencia difícil de una nación, 242.
Even COHEP (for the exception of its member FENAGH) favorably embraced the new government’s policies\(^{88}\) though some of its members did urge for a prompt return to constitutional rule.\(^{89}\)

Although key laws had been implemented and social benefits distributed by this new reformist, military government, it had been done in an effort to appease popular discontent, coopt new social groups and legitimize the military’s control of the state. As Sieder explains, “between 1972 and 1978, patron-client relationships were restructured, recreated and selectively extended in an attempt to incorporate emergent social actors on the terms of those controlling the balance of power within the reformist state.”\(^{90}\) More significantly, the nature of governance had not been altered. Political power continued to be centralized and civil society groups were not given a significant role political decision-making. Civil society obtained favorable government policies only when they mobilized actively for it and threatened to destabilize the political system through their mass protests.

Although the state continued to monopolize governance, the presence of a more tolerant and conciliatory state did foment the growth and increasing militancy of popular organizations. Decree Law #30 encouraged approximately 75,000 previously unorganized workers to join a union between 1972 and 1975, thereby doubling total

\(^{88}\) COHEP’s stance toward López Arellano changed in 1974 when FENAGH, the conservative agrarian and cattlemen’s group, gained control of COHEP’s leadership. After that time COHEP began opposing the new agrarian reform law and accusing the government of facilitating communist organization.

\(^{89}\) Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 21-22.

union membership. Members of the SITRATERCO and its parent federation, FESITRANH, increasingly questioned the ORIT-trained leaders which had controlled their organizations since their founding. The anti-communist leaders of the SITRATERCO were deposed in October 1975 and replaced by a new generation of militant leaders while the FESITRANH risked facing a similar fate. Meanwhile, peasant groups were becoming more aggressive in demanding a swift implementation of the new agrarian reform law. Women’s groups benefited from this renewed peasant belligerence. In 1978 a group of female peasant groups coalesced to form the Federación Hondureña de Mujeres Campesinas (FEHMUC). This organization became a member of the UNC and helped advance the cause of both rural women and landless peasants.

The increasing militancy of these popular groups and the government’s toleration of them led to the eventual demise of López Arellano. Conservative military officers replaced this general as head of state in 1975 after news broke out of his possible complicity in a bribery scandal. The new government presided by Gen. Melgar Castro was hesitant to follow López Arellano’s populist policies.

**The Fragmentation of Civil Society (1975-1980’s)**

The state sought various measures to divide and weaken mass-based groups during the late 1970’s and 1980’s. Repression was used to pacify communist, socialist or belligerent popular groups. In addition, the state together with conservative elites tried

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93 Villars, *Para la casa más que para el mundo*, 469 and 473-479.

to penetrate mass based, civil society groups and turn members against each other. Both of these tactics succeeded in fragmenting the labor and peasant organizations in the country. The more malleable of these groups were coopted by the state and discouraged from participating in mass, public protest. In exchange, they received small, token concessions. Although civil society groups were weakened by these events, they did not cease to engage in politics. Ironically, it is during this period of continual organizational attack that civil society groups most demanded and succeeded in achieving major political-institutional change in Honduras.

Gen. Melgar Castro’s ascendancy to power in 1975 represented a new, more conservative phase of Honduran military rule. Although he chose to continue implementing the country’s new agrarian reform law, peasant groups found the pace of land redistribution to be too slow. This was particularly true of the Social Christian UNC who received the least amount of reform land and no government credit or technical assistance.\(^95\) Dissatisfaction over this situation eventually led 10,000 UNC members to occupy over one hundred farms and block key bridges around the country in mid-1975.\(^96\) Group members also continued to pressure the government for reform land and assistance by sponsoring a mass march and hunger strike in the capital. Conservatives within the military and FENAGH responded to these events by intimidating peasant groups and launching a handful of armed attacks against them (The most notable of these was the Massacre of Los Horcones and the attack on the Center of Santa Clara).\(^97\) These attacks

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\(^{96}\) Morris, Honduras: Caudillo Politics and Military Rule, 48 and Schulz and Sundloff Schulz, The United State, 45.

drove the three main peasant groups in the country (the UNC, ANACH and FECORAH) to form a United Peasant Front in 1975 to collectively pressure the government for the continued implementation of agrarian reform. Meanwhile, the FENAGH and COHEP continued to oppose agrarian reform and threatened to implement investment and production strikes if the law was not altered. These landed elite and business groups also initiated national dialogs with the major political parties and other anti-reformist organizations. In March of 1976 these conservative groups created the Union Nacional de las Instituciones Democráticas (UNID) in order to begin pressing for a return to constitutional rule. Other civil society groups were ambivalent about whether they favored a return to constitutional rule: popular sectors desired democracy but did not want a return to the traditional, bi-party politics of the past. The Melgar Castro government addressed these conflicting citizen demands by redistributing public and foreign-owned lands, repressing both Christian Democratic and Communist-inspired organizations and scheduling elections for a constituent assembly.

The increase in state-sponsored repression contributed to the internal division and fragmentation of peasant and labor groups during the late 1970’s. Some ANACH members disassociated themselves from this organization after mounting frustration over its leadership’s conservative and pro-government stance. Meanwhile some UNC affiliates began accusing group members of adhering to a more leftist ideology than the

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100 d’Ans, *Emergencia difícil de una nación*, 247-248.

one that their group officially espoused. This prompted socialists within the UNC to leave the group. Both of these dissident factions united to form the Unión Nacional de Campesinos Auténticos de Honduras (UNCAH or National Union of Authentic Peasants) in 1977. That same year were former UNC members founded several other peasant organizations. Eventually, five splinter groups emerged from the ranks of the UNC. This significantly weakened the most independent peasant organization in the country.\(^{102}\) The ANACH also was weakened as those disillusioned with the group broke off to form six, smaller peasant organizations. This divisiveness also weakened Honduras’ labor movement. Conservative groups within the FESITRANH formed “democratic fronts” to help depose the recently elected leadership of its member union, the SITRATERCO, and purge all member groups of leftists influences.\(^{103}\) These intra-labor conservative forces united with the large-landed elite group, FENAGH, in 1977 to pressure Melgar Castro for the destitution of his Minister and Vice-Minister of Labor as well as his Minister and Vice-Minister of Public Health and Social Assistance.\(^{104}\) This coincided with the gradual removal of reformist officers from their military command.\(^{105}\)

As conservative and more liberal forces struggled for power within the military and civil society groups, Melgar Castro took steps to make a transition to constitutional rule. He scheduled constituent assembly elections for 1977 (later changed to 1979) and invited leading civil society groups to form part of a 48 member Presidential Advisory Council,


\(^{103}\) Meza, *Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño*, 162-167.

\(^{104}\) Meza, *Historia del movimiento obrero Hondureño*, 158.

the Consejo Asesor de la Jefatura de Estado (CONASE), that was asked to help draft a new electoral law and prepare the way for a democratic transition. The idea to create such an organization had been proposed by the CTH a few years earlier. CONASE represented the first time that broad sectors of Honduran civil society had been given representation in an institution-building process. Thirteen of the organizations that had been invited to form part of this advisory council refused to do so. Among these were the country’s two major political parties and the business group, COHEP. Consequently, CONASE was constituted in 1976 with only thirty-five representatives from civil society groups, minor political parties and the Armed Forces. It is important to highlight that at the time bilateral and international organizations did not encourage such active citizen political participation. The creation of CONASE was largely a result of domestic pressure for democratization and civil society participation. Opposition groups tried to de-legitimize CONASE by criticizing it and referring to it as a CADEJE. Despite such derogatory remarks, CONASE members contributed to the transition process by making a series of recommendations regarding how elections and political parties should be constituted. Although some of these were modified, key proposals were adopted. Among these was the suggestion to facilitate the electoral participation of minority parties and create both a National Citizen Registry and a National Election Tribunal.

106 Specific business organizations had been given political representation in economic decision-making before this time. Similarly, peasant groups had been allowed to help formulate agrarian policies through their representation in INA. CONASE differs in that it brought together all key sectors of Honduran civil society and asked them to help formulate the new rules of the political game, not just a particular government policy.

107 I thank Carlos Arita Valdiviesco for emphasizing this point.

108 CADEJE is a play on words of the popular term cadejo which refers to a mythic dog that roams around in cementaries, hypnotizing people and not letting them cross the road.
CONASE’s suggestions also helped begin the internal democratization of the country’s political parties. The new electoral law required that all of the factions or movements within each political party be represented in congress and be allowed to participate in the selection of that party’s executive committee.109

State-civil society relations deteriorated after August 1978 when Melgar Castro was deposed by more conservative military officers. The new government now headed by a military triumvirate disbanded CONASE110 and purged the armed forces of reformist officers. Although the new government did not abandon plans for a return to constitutional rule (largely due to continued U.S. pressure for such a measure), it did pursue more conservative public policies. Agrarian reform, for example, came to a virtual halt during the first few months after the coup. Peasant groups responded by forming a Frente Nacional Campesina Hondureña (FUNACAMH or Honduran National Peasant Front) and continuing to demand land redistribution and favorable agrarian policies. FUNACAMH sponsored land invasions in four departments that resulted in the settlement of 6000 hectares of unoccupied land. As in 1975, this renewed peasant front succeeded in replacing the head of INA.111 The government reacted to increasing peasant militancy by continuing its land reform program but guaranteeing the inviolability of private property. Essentially, this meant that the government continued redistributing national lands but increased its repression of organized groups. Marches and strikes were forcefully disbanded, squatters were brutally dislodged, and participants in these events

109 Becerra, Evolución histórica de Honduras, 209; Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 26-44; and Interview with Carlos Arita Valdiviesco, Representative of FEUH in CONASE, November 29, 1999.

110 Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 45-47.

were jailed and beaten. The military also quelled popular activism by forcefully replacing leaders of popular organizations with corrupt and pro-government ones. Some civil society groups continued to mobilize despite such acts. The Social Christian UNC and CGT demanded the implementation of agrarian reform, the protection of labor union rights, better salaries and working conditions and increasingly also the need to return to constitutional rule.\textsuperscript{112} They together with other labor groups also issued a barrage of public declarations in 1979 condemning the governments’ repression and involvement in organized civil society affairs.\textsuperscript{113} But these were to no avail. With the Sandinista revolutionary victory in Nicaragua and the increasing armed conflict in El Salvador and Guatemala, domestic and international pressure to suppress popular protest movements mounted. While the government demobilized and coopted popular groups who engaged in public protest activities, conservatives outside of government tried to establish new, popular organizations. Right-wing industrialists and bankers formed the \textit{Asociación Para el Progreso de Honduras} (APROH or Association for the Progress of Honduras) during the late 1970’s. APROH distributed land to 125,000 landless families in order to prevent their radicalization and build an anti-communist political support base.\textsuperscript{114}

The transition to constitutional rule was accompanied by a further deterioration in state-society relations. The new civilian government of Roberto Suazo Cordoba brought some of the most conservative elements of Honduran society to power. Perhaps of greatest significance was the nomination of General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, a

\textsuperscript{112} Personal Interview with Felicito Avila, Secretary General of the CGT, October 25, 1999.

\textsuperscript{113} To read some of these manifestos see Victor Meza, \textit{Antología de documentos sobre la situación del movimiento obrero en Honduras} (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Universitaria, 1981): 362-439.

\textsuperscript{114} Funes, 337-339.
graduate of the Argentine Military School, as the new head of the armed forces.

Meanwhile, the U.S. mounted its political pressure on Honduras to combat armed insurgents in the isthmus. This confluence of events encouraged the development of an even more closed and repressive state apparatus. Beginning in 1980 the Honduran state sponsored a systematic campaign of torture, executions and disappearances against organized civil society groups. The purported aim was to counter leftists guerrilla movements and contain the spread of Communism. Between 1980 and 1984 there were 133 political assassinations, 293 disappearances and nearly 200 reported cases of torture. Such violent attacks had occurred only rarely in Honduras before the 1980’s. So “it was particularly tragic and ironic that the pattern of [human rights] abuse … increased notoriously with the advent of democracy and civilian rule.”

This state-sponsored violence never reached the level of those being committed in neighboring states, but it led to the ideological polarization and demobilization of peasant and labor organizations. Several leftists unions that had formed part of the pro-government CTH decided to separate from this federation in 1981 and establish the socialist Federación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (FUTH or Unitary Federation of Honduran Workers) The FUTH was influenced by the Honduran

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Communist Party during its first year of existence. Consequently, the state refused to grant it legal recognition and launched a series of violent attacks against its member unions: offices were vandalized and key union leaders were assassinated.\textsuperscript{117} FUNACAMH, the peasant front that had been organized in 1979, also began to disintegrate in 1982 when the ANACH and FECORAH decided to disassociate themselves from it because of the group’s belligerence. The few, unfederated peasant organizations that remained decided to disband FUNACAMH officially in 1984 and form the \textit{Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo} (CNTC or National Rural Workers’ Central) the following year. Newly formed women’s groups were also divided as a result of the ideological differences among their members. Members of FEHMUC, the female peasant group founded in 1978, who demanded greater political participation and social justice were accused of being communists and expelled from this organization in 1985. They went on to found the \textit{Consejo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer} (CODIMCA or Council for the Integrated Development of Women) three years later. Another faction within FEHMUC accused their organization’s leadership of mismanaging funds and chose to form a new female peasant group in 1989.\textsuperscript{118} The constant fragmentation of Honduran peasant groups inhibited their ability to pressure the government for land reform. This is most clearly evidenced by the fact that between 1980 and 1983 different peasants groups solicited the distribution of over 384,000 hectares of land but were granted only 20\% of these.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{117} Schulz and Sundloff, Schulz, \textit{The United State}, 210-211.

\textsuperscript{118} Villars, \textit{Para la casa más que para el mundo}, 475-477.

\textsuperscript{119} Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH), \textit{Boletín Informativo} #34 (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH, 1988).
The government also used less violent tactics to appease and divide popular organizations. It continued to penetrate labor and peasant groups through the formation of democratic fronts. These managed to gain control of the SITRATERCO, FEUH and the electrical company union. They also weakened the internal structure of other popular groups and turned members against each other. During the early 1980’s the ultra-conservative APROH tried to take over the leadership of ANACH and succeeded in incorporating the group’s secretary general into its membership. The state also coopted organizations in order to contain their militancy. The Social Christian UNC and CGT were granted legal recognition in 1984 and brought into closer dialog with the state. Government officials took advantage of the improved communication with these groups to discourage them from engaging in mass protest activities. They warned that if popular mobilization continued, the military would be encouraged reassure direct control of government once again. In order to further dissuade popular groups from undertaking mass protest activities, the government also emitted an anti-terrorist law (Decree Law #33-82) that outlawed land invasions, factory occupations and street demonstrations. Hundreds of peasant and labor activists were imprisoned for such activities. The reemergence of party politics further contributed to the division of popular groups. Military rule had weakened political parties and encouraged Hondurans to organize themselves on the basis of shared class or group interests. But the resurrection of partisan

120 Schulz and Sundloff Schulz, The United State, Honduras and the Crisis, 91 and 209-215.


122 Ibid, 116-117 and Interview with Felicito Avila, secretary General of the CGT, October 25, 1999.

123 Schulz and Sundloff Schulz, The United State, Honduras and the Crisis, 83 + 91 and Ruhl, “The Honduran Agrarian Reform,” 76.
politics re-ignited old political divisions and diminished the cohesion of many civil society groups.\textsuperscript{124} As a result, the “role of civil society in the post-transition consolidation was efficiently weakened during the first few years of the 1980’s.”\textsuperscript{125} This has led several popular group leaders to describe the 1980’s as a lost decade.\textsuperscript{126}

Nevertheless, newer civil society groups began to form amidst the fragmentation of traditional mass-based organizations. Indigenous groups began to emerge during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. The various tribal groups inhabiting the heavily forested area of Eastern Honduras formed the \textit{Moskitia Asla Takanka} (MASTA or Mosquitia Unity) in 1976. The following year, the Garífuna, a mix race of indigenous groups and African descendants, established the \textit{Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña} (OFRANEH or Fraternal Honduran Black Organization). At first, these organizations tried to advance their needs independently of one another with little success. But the disparate, ethnic communities in the country coalesced in 1980 to form the \textit{Confederación de Pueblos Autóctonos de Honduras} (CONPAH or Confederation of Honduran Autoctonous People). Other indigenous groups joined CONPAH as they were formed. Initially, CONPAH tried to secure basic social, economic and political rights for its members through peaceful dialogue, but it was not taken seriously by the state. When indigenous leaders managed to secure an appointment with a government agency, they were assigned to speak with lower-level officials who could not respond to their needs or help them in any real way.

\textsuperscript{124} Interview with Felicito Avila, secretary General of the CGT, October 25, 1999.


\textsuperscript{126} Interview with Andrés Pavón, Director of CODEM, October 27, 1999.
Nevertheless, race-based groups continued to unite and strengthen during this period. They would become more politically active the following decade.\textsuperscript{127}

Several human rights organizations also emerged in the 1980’s. The \textit{Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos} (CODEH or Committee for the Defense of Human Rights) was founded in mid-1981 by a group of five upper-middle class professionals who were concerned about the increasing level of violence in the country. The following year a group of primarily women whose family members had been disappeared founded the \textit{Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Honduras} (COFADEH). Many of those who joined COFADEH had no previous organizational experience but had been spurred into action by the increasing level of violence in the country. COFADEH members marched in the center of Tegucigalpa one Friday of every month, holding pictures of missing relatives and signs asking, “Where are they?”\textsuperscript{128} They also helped relatives of the disappeared file formal inquiries into their loved ones’ whereabouts. The CODEH, however, developed into the largest and most belligerent human rights organizations in the country. By the end of the decade they had established regional offices throughout Honduras and formed voluntary, local committees in 70% of the country’s municipalities. CODEH kept a public record of human rights abuses, denounced these before national and international agencies, and helped citizens bring criminal cases to court.\textsuperscript{129} The Honduran Bar Association also formed a human rights

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\textsuperscript{127} Interview with Gregoria Flores, President of OFRNA and secretary of COMPAH, October 18, 1999.


\textsuperscript{129} Interview with Andrés Pavón, Director of CODEM, October 27, 1999 and Guillermo Perez, “Enhancing the Instruments for Human Rights Protection in Honduras,” \textit{Honduras Confronts its Future: Contending Perspectives on Critical Issues}, eds. Mark B. Rosenberg and Philip L. Shepherd (Boulder: Lynne Rienner,
committee that offered legal services to victims of violence. The judiciary often refused to investigate or prosecute the human rights cases brought before it. Nevertheless, the legal and political actions undertaken by the newly-created human rights groups were significant because, as the Director of CODEH explained, “por primera vez [los que estaban en poder] se empezaron a sentir vigilados, se empezaron a sentir analizados.”

The newly formed human rights groups united with labor, peasant, student and teachers groups in 1984 to form el Comité Coordinador de Organizaciones Populares (CCOP). The CCOP demanded that the government put an end to human rights abuses, respect the nation’s sovereignty and not intervene in the internal affairs of civil society groups. The CCOP became the principal, mass-based opposition force to President Suazo Cordoba’s conservative regime.

Suazo Córdoba’s attempts to curtail the independence of the other branches of government, manipulate the leadership of the National and Liberal Parties and unlawfully extend his presidential term further galvanized civil society groups into action. An ad hoc group of distinguished Hondurans from the country’s four major political parties issued a manifesto in 1984 demanding respect for the constitution, punishment for


132 “For the first time [those in power] started to feel watched, started to feel analyzed.” Andrés Pavón, Director of CODEH, October 26, 1999.

133 Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 95-96 and Posas, Breve historia, 42.
government corruption, primary elections and an end to the state’s intervention in political party affairs. Leading labor and peasant groups (including the CGT, CTH, FESITRANH, FECESITLIH, UNC ANACH and FECORAH) also united in early 1985 to denounce the country’s political situation. In order to resolve the country’s immediate institutional crisis these civil society groups presented the Suazo government with two main options: a) that primary elections be held or b) that all presidential candidates within each party be allowed to participate in the general election set for the end of 1985. These mass-based groups threatened to sponsor a general labor strike if the government did not act on these matters by April 10, 1985. The Honduran Armed Forces responded by hosting discussions among representatives of key labor and peasant groups, the Catholic Church and the country’s leading political parties. The Armed Forces threatened to sponsor a coup if a political compromise was not reached. Participants in these negotiations finally drafted a Compromise Act on May 19, 1985. Signatory groups agreed to accept “Option B” that had been proposed by labor and peasant groups, thereby allowing presidential candidates from each party to participate in the 1985 general election. They also agreed to institute electoral reforms and grant peasant and labor unions participation in the design and implementation of a National Development Plan.\footnote{Ibid, 102 and 109-111; Schulz and Schulz, The United States, 122-128; and Mario Posas, Momentos estelares de la participación de la CTH en la vida política nacional, (Tegucigalpa: Artes Gráficas, 1987).}

Civil society groups began to reorganize almost immediately after President Azcona’s new government was installed. Those labor and peasant groups who had mediated the 1985 crisis—the CGT, CTH, CNTC, FCH, FECORAH and CNTC—united more formally in 1986 to form the Consejo Nacional Obrero y Campesio de Honduras (CONOCH or National Peasant and Labor Council of Honduras). The CONOCH sought
to ensure that the 1985 Compromise Act, particularly the clause granting civil society
groups participation in government decision-making, would be respected. Unfortunately,
the CONOCH suffered a premature death. The ORIT-backed CGT was hesitant to
support some of this group’s political activities. In addition, Azcona tried to divide
CONOCH by inviting the peasant groups that composed it to become part of the
Asociación Campesina Unificadora (ACU or Unified Peasant Association). He appeased
ACU members by offering them land, credit and other benefits and encouraged them to
oppose belligerent labor unions. Although the CNTC refused to join the ACU, the FCH
and FECORAH were lured into it. This temporarily destroyed the new peasant and labor
union that had been achieved through CONOCH.135 In the absence of such a mass-based
pressure group, President Azcona easily ignored the 1985 agreement he had signed. Not
only did he not allow civil society groups to help develop and execute a National
Development Plan, but he also replaced CONSUPLANE, a government planning agency
which granted civil society groups limited participation, with a technocratic National
Planning Council in 1986.136

International events and the active political role of the Honduran Catholic Church
enabled civil society groups to continue pressuring for institutional reform. The signing
of the Central American Peace Accord on August 7, 1987 created a National
Reconciliation Commission under the direction of the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa,
Monsignor Héctor Enrique Santos. The National Reconciliation Commission accepted

135 Posas, Momentos estelares, 38-39; Mario Posas, ¿Hay democracia en Honduras? Puntos de Vista:
Temas Políticos, (Tegicigalpa: CEDOH, 1992): 107; and interview with Marvin Ponce, executive director
of COCOCH, November 2, 1999.

136 Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 127-128.
petitions from citizens and civil society groups and made recommendations to the
government based on these. Civil society groups used this new forum to demand a series
of political changes, including the end of state-sponsored violence, the derogation of the
1982 anti-terrorism law, the return of political exiles, reforms to the existing electoral law
and the expulsion of both Nicaraguan Contras and U.S. troops from Honduran soil.
Unfortunately, there was no mechanism to ensure that the government would implement
or even respond to the demands placed before it. Meanwhile, the fragmentation and
polarization of civil society groups inhibited these from pressuring the government more
forcefully. Monsignor Santos tried to remedy this problem by calling for a “National
Dialogue.” This was intended to encourage civil society groups to dialogue and
cooperate with one another and form a stronger political block. Unfortunately,
participants were unable to form a lasting, union. Future governments would appropriate
the idea of a national dialogue to further legitimate their rule.137

Although Honduran mass-based groups were divided and weakened during the late
1970’s and 1980’s by the state’s repression, cooptation and meddling in their internal
affairs, they continued to involve themselves in national politics. As a result, Honduras
took some qualitative steps towards democracy. A new electoral law was drafted and
implemented with the help of CONASE. A constitutional crisis was averted in 1985 due
to the military’s and civil society’s mediation. As a result, there was a peaceful transition
from one elected civilian to another, the Supreme Court was reorganized and new laws
were passed guaranteeing that primary elections would be held in the future under the
supervision of the National Elections Tribunal. Although state-centered elites continued

137 Posas, Modalidades del proceso, 124-125.
to dominate political decision-making during this period, it was clear that they could not continue to ignore civil society groups in this process. Moreover, their attempts to divide and weaken mass-based groups in order to temper their political involvement had failed. Despite these affronts, mass-based groups continued to challenge political elites and demand significant political changes. Their intransigence and commitment to socio-political democracy would force future governments to confront this social force in new and innovative ways.

**The Reunification and Political Incorporation of Civil Society**

Civil society organizations began to set aside their group-differences and tackle common socio-political goals during the late 1980’s. The disparate peasant and labor groups in the country began to coalesce into broader federations and form cross-sectoral linkages with other interest groups. Initially, the state responded to these events with coercion. But as the Cold War came to an end and the threat of Communism was abated, political elites were forced to develop new ways of confronting the renewed activism of civil society groups. In order to discourage these organizations from resorting to mass protests as a means of political negotiation, civilian governments began creating forums to institutionalize regular and peaceful state-society communication. These new dialogue channels had the dual effect of increasing civil society’s voice in public decision-making while facilitating the state’s ability to pacify and coopt them. Although the state remained the dominant political actor, these political changes marked the beginning of a slow shift in Honduran governance.

Peasant and labor groups began to unite once again during the last two years of Azcona’s term in office. By then it had become clear that the President Azcona would not grant ACU members the land, credit and benefits he had promised them and that he
had only tried to divide mass-based organizations through these empty promises. Meanwhile, the country was sinking into a deeper economic crisis. Inflation was skyrocketing and there was an increasing shortage of gasoline, food and medicine. The government declared its inability to repay its foreign debt in 1988. In response, the U.S. cut bilateral aid to Honduras, the World Bank declared it ineligible for further loans and international lending agencies began demanding the implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms. The political economic situation in the country encouraged the CNTC, FECORAH and a few smaller peasant groups to unite in 1988 to form the Consejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras (COCOCH or Coordinated Council of Honduran Peasants). COCOCH represented some of the most militant peasant organizations in the country. The following year leading labor unions (the CGT, CTH, FUTH, and FITH), peasant groups (COCOCH, CHC and FECORAH) and professional organizations formed the Plataforma de Lucha (Fighting Platform) in order to promote the democratization and socially just development of Honduras. Members of the Plataforma de Lucha issued a document on October 1989, just a month before general elections were scheduled to take place, demanding a series of social, economic and political reforms. They asked the government to end its national security doctrine, grant civil society groups participation in public decision-making and reform the existing electoral law so that voters could elect mayors, congressional representatives and a president from different parties. Members of the Plataforma de Lucha also committed themselves to strengthening and consolidating their constitutive groups,

138 Up until then, Hondurans merely voted for a party when they went to the polls. The party that won the most votes in a municipality would select a mayor there, and the party who received the most votes in the nation would appoint their presidential candidate as the new head of state.
raising the political awareness of their affiliates and preventing foreign interference in their organization’s affairs.\footnote{139 Interview with Marvin Ponce, executive director of COCOCH, November 2, 1999; Posas, \textit{¿Hay democracia en Honduras?} 105-106; and COCOCH et al, \textit{Plataforma de lucha del movimiento obrero, campesino, cooperativo y profesional}, (Tegucigalpa: CHC, 1989).}

Meanwhile, new social actors were increasing their political militancy. After several decades of non-involvement in national political events, females organized the First Congress of Honduran Women’s Groups in 1992 where they resolved to demand greater participation in government and political responsiveness to issues such as domestic violence.\footnote{140 Villars, \textit{Para la casa más que para el mundo}, 551-650.} The traditionally neglected, indigenous inhabitants of Honduras also increased their level of organization and political activism during this period. The \textit{Organización Nacional Indígena Lenca} (ONILH or National Indigenous Lenca Organization) was founded in 1989. It began training local Lenca leaders and sponsoring mass pilgrimages to the capital in order to demand more land and social services for its people. The divided Maya Chorti in Western Honduras also began uniting at around this time and joined CONPAH, a group that had come to represent nine black and indigenous groups in the country by the early 1990’s.\footnote{141 Interview with Napoleón Mejía, Consejero menor de los Maya Chorti de Ocotepeque, April 5, 2000.} COMPAH became more militant, as well. Since the state continued to be unresponsive to their needs, these indigenous groups sponsored mass protests, led pilgrimages to the capital and took over foreign embassies in order to voice their demands.\footnote{142 Interview with Gregoria Flores, President of OFRNA and secretary of COMPAH, October 18, 1999.}

Initially, the still autonomous armed forces continued to use repression to contain mass based groups. During just the first ten months of 1990 there were 200 illegal...
detentions, 79 reported cases of torture and four political assassinations in Honduras.\textsuperscript{143} The yearly incidence of torture continued to increase from 1991-1993 while the yearly number of political assassinations and illegal detentions remained about the same.\textsuperscript{144} But with the end of the Cold War and the signing of the Central American Peace Accords, military repression became a less acceptable form of containing popular discontent.

Leonardo Callejas, who had risen to the presidency in 1990, used multiple tactics to confront the increasing unity and mobilization of civil society groups. First, he tried to divide and coopt member of mass based organizations, particularly those associated with the \textit{Plataforma de Lucha}. Callejas invited the president of the CGT to be a representative in Congress while a key CTH leader was offered the post of \textit{designado presidencial} (similar to a vice president) in his administration. Such political opportunities had never been extended to civil society leaders. Some of the individuals who were offered these positions accepted them, believing that it would enhance their ability to defend labor and peasant interests. But once they assumed these jobs, it became more difficult for them to confront the government and represent their group needs.\textsuperscript{145} The CGT, for example, discouraged its members from engaging in public marches or protests during Callejas’ presidency and opposed fellow worker federations who did the same. This brought them into direct conflict with more belligerent groups such as the FUTH and weakened the solidarity between members of the \textit{Plataforma de Lucha}. Further division and inter-

\textsuperscript{143} CODEH, \textit{Informe de violaciones a los derechos humanos en Honduras, enero-octubre 1990}, (Tegucigalpa: CODEH, 1990).


\textsuperscript{145} Interview with Conrado Lando, general secretary of the CTH, November 3, 1999;
organizational resentment was bred by the fact that the government offered coopted labor and peasant groups an abandoned government building (the former CONADI building) as office space while other organizations received no such aid.

Whenever Callejas could not coopt a popular organization, he tried to break them. In 1991, for example, the FUTH-affiliated *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Empresa Nacional de Energía Electrica* (STENEE or Workers Sindicate of the National Electric Energy Company) went on strike in order to protest the privatization of the national energy company (*Empresa Nacional de Energía Electrica* or ENEE), the layoff of 500 workers and an increase in energy prices. Callejas responded by ordering the military to take over the ENEE’s facilities, dismissing workers, evicting some from their homes and imposing a new, executive committee with whom it negotiated an end to the labor strike. The STENEE practically ceased to exist as a result of these events.¹⁴⁶

Callejas adeptly demobilized popular groups through dialogue as well. Throughout his presidential campaign he had spoken of the need to reach a *concertación nacional* (or national agreement) on matters of public importance. The *concertación* was conceived as a semi-corporatist arrangement wherein organized civil society groups would be encouraged to debate and advise the government on policy issues.¹⁴⁷ Soon after assuming the presidency, Callejas organized several public forums in order to achieve a *concertación* over his new economic policies. His government had drafted a structural adjustment law with the assistance of international financial institutions. Although the

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business group, COHEP, supported these neo-liberal reforms, most of the mass-based organizations in the country, including members of the Plataforma de Lucha, vehemently opposed them. These sponsored a total of 40 general strikes in 1990 alone to express their opposition to the government’s proposed economic policies.\textsuperscript{148} The Catholic bishops in Honduras backed these mass-based groups by demanding a more equitable structural adjustment package.\textsuperscript{149} Callejas wanted to secure popular support for his economic policies in order to avoid further protests. Members of the Plataforma de Lucha were key participants in these forums. The government was able to manipulate these proceedings by not giving participant groups enough time to read and study the proposed legislation. Conrado Lando, president of the CTH, claims that civil society representatives were given about half an hour to read a 1000 page document. The government then explained the contents of the draft law, accepted questions and comments on it and ultimately convinced participants of the country’s need for its passage. They assured those present that the negative effects of structural adjustment would be outweighed by the creation of two new autonomous government agencies that would be charged with promoting social programs to counter poverty.\textsuperscript{150} In the end, several civil society groups approved the structural adjustment law either because they had been coopted by the government and/or because they did not understand well what it

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{148} d’Ans, \textit{Emergencia difícil de una nación}, 291.
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\textsuperscript{149} José María Ferrero, “La Iglesia Católica ante el gobierno del cambio,” \textit{Puntos de Vista} (marzo 1991): 13-25
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{150} These agencies are the \textit{Fondo Hondureno de Inversion Social} (FHIS or Honduran Social Investment Fund) and the \textit{Programa Rural de Asistencia Familiar} (PRAF or Rural Program for Family Assistance).
\end{flushright}
contained. The government, on the other hand, was able to justify its new economic policies by claiming that civil society groups had approved it.\textsuperscript{151}

The Callejas government promoted a similar \textit{concertación} in the agricultural sector by inviting FENAGH, which represented Honduras’ landed elites, and various peasant groups to develop a new agrarian law that would secure basic food needs and foment agricultural production. As had occurred with the structural adjustment law, several peasant groups were coopted by the government through this process. They together with FENAGH eventually supported a new agricultural law which 1) made it more difficult for privately-owned land to be expropriated for agrarian reform; 2) relieved the National Agrarian Institute from its legally prescribed role of offering training, credit and counseling to peasant groups; and 3) allowed cooperatives to parcel out, privatize and sell the agrarian reform land they had been granted. In return, the government promised to distribute titles to lands that had been occupied illegally. Although some key peasant groups such as the ANACH and CNTC refused to support this bill, the Callejas government justified its passage of the Law for Agricultural Modernization by claiming that it had been developed with the participation and support of peasant and agricultural groups. In both of these cases, the \textit{concertación} granted mass-based groups only limited participation in political decision-making while improving the state’s ability to manipulate them.\textsuperscript{152} Callejas’ adept cooptation and manipulation of civil society leaders led also to the weakening of some of the strongest civil society groups. Members of

\textsuperscript{151} Interview with Conrado Lando, general secretary of the CTH, November 3, 1999.

these organizations simply lost faith in their leadership and came to believe that these individuals were corrupt and easily coopted. As Conrado Lando, president of the CTH explained, “Habia que recobrar la confianza del pueblo porque lo habiamos perdido.”

The concertación was more successful in addressing popular demands for political reform. The government sponsored two national forums in 1991 to ask civil society groups suggestions on how to improve and modernize the Honduran state. A few months later the National Congress passed a law that created a Commission for the Modernization of the State—a group composed of seventeen government and twenty-three civil society representatives and presided by the president. This was intended to be a permanent, deliberative body that analyzed existing political conditions and proposed reforms that would improve the operation of the state. Participants believed the Commission for the Modernization of the State would reorganize state-society relations and democratize the Honduran political system. Manuel Bonilla, the program’s first coordinator, notes that the idea for such a government body originated with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). These international organizations developed a list of administrative procedures that they felt should be improved and then provided the funds to develop the bureaucratic structure needed to tackle these problems. Initially, these international donors did not consider the need to reform Honduran

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153 “We had to regain the people’s confidence because we had lost it.” Interview with Conrado Lando, general secretary of the CTH, November 3, 1999.


political institutions. The idea for that was proposed by civil society groups in the two *concertación* forums held in 1991 where they expressed their desire to reform the country’s electoral laws, eliminate corruption, depoliticize the judicial system and improve the operation of Congress. On the basis of these suggestions the Commission for the Modernization of the State developed and submitted to Congress a series of laws intended to change existing political institutions. This led to various electoral reforms, a new Law of Municipalities (1990), and the creation of both a Human Rights Commissioner and a Public Ministry. The later was an independent branch of government charged with investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by state officials. Although civil society groups were able to influence key institutional changes such as these, they did not achieve the dramatic transformations that they had originally envisioned. The electoral reforms that were passed in 1991-1994, for example, only slightly altered the country’s electoral system. Although the new Law of Municipalities established the framework for decentralizing power and resources to municipal governments and created mechanisms for citizen participation at a local level, there was little political will to implement the prescribed changes. Moreover, the reforms to the judicial and legislative systems that had been called for by civil society groups were never approved because there was insufficient political party support for them.

Nevertheless, the Commission for the Modernization of the State did mark an important change in Honduran governance and was able to propel the process of democratization forward.

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157 Cosenza Jiménez, “La modernización del estado en Honduras.”
Traditional, mass based groups were reinvigorated by Carlos Roberto Reina’s assumption to the presidency in 1994. Reina was a former president of the Interamerican Human Rights Court and represented the social democratic wing of the Liberal Party—a group that had persistently been impeded from taking control of government by conservative forces. Reina committed himself to launching a new phase in Honduras’ political history wherein true representative democracy and social justice would be achieved. Mass-based groups increased their demands and level of public protests in the hopes that this new government would be more responsive to them. Indigenous groups, for example, launched their most aggressive public march until then—la Marcha de la Dignidad—just months into Reina’s new presidency in order to demand that their basic socio-economic needs be met.158 They continued to sponsor a series of marches and protests thereafter. Although peasant and labor groups found it difficult to reunite and garner grass roots support, the increasing poverty brought about by structural adjustment encouraged members to overcome these challenges and fight for a common cause. The same was true of newer organizations representing urban slum dwellers and street vendors. Not surprisingly, most of the demands made by these groups were economic in nature. But many were political, as well. They demanded institutional change, administrative efficiency and greater participation in government.159 During just the first two years of Reina’s presidency, these mass-based groups sponsored 28 marches, 13 road blockades and issued 83 manifestos.160

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158 Interview with Gregoria Flores, President of OFRNA and secretary of COMPAH, October 18, 1999.

159 Leticia Salomón, Julietta Castellanos and Mirna Flores, Ciudadanía y participación en Honduras, (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH, 1996): chapter III.

160 Salomón, Castellanos and Flores, Ciudadanía y participación, Chapter V, especially 125.
Reina responded to many of these demands by increasing the participation of civil society in government policy-making. The Commission for the Modernization of the State was expanded to include four, new sub-commissions assigned to study how to strengthen the rule of law and reform the executive, judiciary and electoral systems.\textsuperscript{161} Although these groups were unable to promote dramatic institutional changes, they did introduce some notable reforms. For instance, they drafted and succeeded in passing amendments to the existing electoral law thus enabling Hondurans to vote for mayors, congressional deputies and the president on separate ballots. Reina also created new government oversight commissions with civil society representation within the public energy and telephone companies, the banking regulatory body and the Human Rights Commission.

Reina also established the \textit{Consejo Nacional de Convergencia} (CONACON or National Convergence Council) in 1995 in order to encourage civil society groups from different sectors to dialogue with each other, formulate coherent policies and jointly propose these to the government. CONACON was composed of representatives from labor unions, peasant groups, human rights organizations, women’s groups and professional associations. Unlike the CONASE that had been established by the military in the late 1970’s, the National Dialogue that had been promoted by Monsignor Santos in the late 1980’s and Callejas’ \textit{concertación nacional}, the CONACON was meant to be a permanent dialogue forum. It was divided into five working groups that were charged with discussing issues related to health, education, infrastructure, land and agriculture. Each of these met at a national level about once or twice a month. Representatives would

\textsuperscript{161} Cosenza Jiménez, “La modernización del estado en Honduras.”
then report the proceedings to their civil society group and obtained their suggestions for future actions. Through this process, several policy recommendations were made, and a total of fourteen accords were signed with the government. However, the organization’s work was hindered by the fact that it lacked a main office or a permanent office personnel. In the end, only about a tenth of the accords drafted by CONACON resulted in concrete policy outcomes.\footnote{Interview with Marco Orlando Iriarte, Executive Secretary of FONAC, October 6, 1999; Interview with Gregoria Flores, President of OFRNA and secretary of COMPAH, October 18, 1999 and Interview with Carlos Arita Valdiviesco, General Secretary of the Commission for the Participation of Civil Society in National Reconstruction, November 29, 1999.}

Reina was more successful in restructuring civil-military relations. He removed the armed forces from the control of seven strategic, public agencies including the national telephone and electric company. He also eliminated forced military recruitment as well as those police and military units that had been responsible for the most heinous human rights violations during the 1980’s. A new civilian police force was created instead and placed under the direction of a new, civilian-led Security Ministry, the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Interior* (CONASIN). Civil society groups was significant participation in this ministerial body. Meanwhile, all criminal investigations were placed under the supervision of the Public Ministry.\footnote{Ruhl, “Honduras: Militarism and Democratization” 58-60; Funes, *Los deliberantes*, 385-396; Leticia Salomón, *Las relaciones civiles-militares en Honduras: balance y perspectivas* (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH, 1999): 64-83.} All of these reforms arose in large part due to the incessant work of the country’s human rights groups during the preceding decade and the activism of a new organization, the *Foro Ciudadano sobre Seguridad Pública*. The Human Rights Commissioner encouraged human rights groups to form the *Foro*
Ciudadano in 1997.Originally the government simply wanted to transfer the existing police body from military to civilian control. The Human Rights Commissioner and the Foro Ciudadano successfully lobbied to create an entirely new police force to protect citizen rights. They helped draft an Organic Police Law which created CONASIN, a supervisory body composed of civil society and government representatives who was charged with overseeing the operations of the new police force. Moreover, five out of CONASIN’s eleven members came from civil society groups. As can be expected, all of these reforms led to a dramatic decline in human rights abuses.

The Reina administration was also very responsive to civil society’s calls for a reduction in Honduras’ unsustainable foreign debt, which equaled 100% of the country’s GDP in 1995. The Foro Social de la Deuda Externa de Honduras (FOSDEH) was established in 1996 by professional associations, coffee cooperatives, NGOs and the peasant and labor group COCOCH. FOSDEH tried to educate the Honduran public about the unsustainability of their country’s foreign debt. They also initiated discussions with the Finance Ministry on how the country could combat this problem. FOSDEH worked incessantly with the state to make the case before international lending agencies that Honduras’ foreign debt should be condoned as part of the IMF’s Heavily Indebted

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164 The CODEH, COFADEH, CPRT and CIPRODEH formed the core of the Foro Ciudadano.


167 The information in this paragraph is derived from an interview with Martin Orlando Barahona, member of FOSDEH and President of the Federation of Associations of University Professional of Honduras, August 1, 1999 and an interview with Irvin Jerez, member of FOSDEH, October 19, 1999.
Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) begun in 1997.\textsuperscript{168} Their collaborative work helped Honduras qualified for the HIPC in 2002.

Reina tried but was less successful at responding to popular group demands to curtail government corruption. Under his administration, the Public Ministry and General Comptroller’s Office launched a veritable war against those state officials who had misused or expropriated public funds or sponsored other criminal acts in the past. All of this was done with the active participation of civil society representatives. Unfortunately, these government bodies only pursued members of the opposition party, particularly those that had been part of the Callejas administration, but overlooked equally illegal acts that were occurring under Reina or that had been committed by past Liberal governments. Moreover, Cosenza Jiménez argues that “instead of fighting the root causes of corruption, … state comptrollers and the Public Ministry [were used] to combat corruption, forgetting that these comptroller agencies … traditionally had been controlled and manipulated by professional politicians.”\textsuperscript{169} As a result, government corruption continued to flourish. By the end of the decade Transparency International rated Honduras as having the most corrupt public administration system in all of Latin America.\textsuperscript{170}


\textsuperscript{169} Cosenza Jiménez, “La modernización del estado en Honduras.”

Despite these failings, Reina improved the nature of governance and advanced the process of democratization in Honduras by allowing an unprecedented level of civil society participation in government. As a result, civil-military relations were reformulated and important steps were taken to democratize the country’s electoral system. Unlike Callejas, Reina did not coopt, divide and manipulate civil society groups in order to implement policies that went against popular groups desires. He either responded to their calls for change or, when there was insufficient political will to do this, simply dialogued with civil society representatives and did not act on their demands.

Carlos Flores Facusse’s assumption to the presidency in 1998 initially worsened state-society relations. Although he had stated throughout his presidential campaign that he was committed to expanding civil society participation in government and decentralization, he did little to advance either. Flores refused to summon the Commission for the Modernization of the State or the CONACON into session during the first few months of this administration. (This highlighted one of the problems with these organizations—that their ability to promote a dialogue among civil society groups and increase their influence over public policies was dependent on the will of state-centered, political elites.) Flores also reversed a process of decentralization that had been developing in the health sector since 1990 and refused to transfer 5% of the national budget to municipal governments as mandated by law. This brought him in direct conflict with the Asociación de Municipios de Honduras (AMHON or the Association of Honduran Municipalities), a group that represented the interest of municipal governments and that had become increasingly active during the 1990’s.
Carlos Flores Facussé expressed his willingness to continue promoting the process of convergence. Yet many doubted his commitment to this. Flores represented the conservative arm of the Liberal Party. Both he and key members of his cabinet had been part of Suazo Cordoba’s administration in the 1980’s and had had a tendency to centralize decision-making in the past. However, in May of 1998 Flores finally convoked a meeting of leading civil society groups. Rather than continue supporting the CONACON, Flores chose to create another, almost identical organization: the Foro de Convergencia Nacional (FONAC or Forum of National Convergence). This essentially destroyed much of the work that had been undertaken by CONACON and created a new institutional structure. Flores justified this move by claiming that the FONAC’s creation had been mandated by law whereas the CONACON had no legal standing.171 Like the CONACON, the FONAC encouraged civil society groups to analyze and discuss national problems, reach a consensus on these and make proposals to the government on how to tackle these. Unlike its predecessor, this new forum was supplied with an office and secretarial personnel by the government. Although the group was required to meet only once every six months, participants managed to meet more frequently and make a proposal in September 1998 on how to improve national security.172

Some civil society groups questioned the FONAC’s purpose. Many feared that since the state had initiated the formation of and ultimately directed the agenda of both

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171 Flores was president of the National Congress during Reina’s presidency and often tried to assert his political power and oppose presidential directives. The FONAC is a case in point. Flores had helped pass legislation calling for the creation of the FONAC in December of 1994. Reina had chosen to ignore the law but respect its spirit by creating the CONACON. Flores argued that this organization had no legal foundation. Therefore, he dissolved the CONACON and instituted the FONAC upon assuming the presidency in 1997.

172 Interview with Marco Orlando Iriarte, Executive Secretary of FONAC, October 6, 1999.
the CONACON and the Commission on the Modernization of the State, participants were susceptible to government manipulation and cooptation. The continued weakness of many traditional groups increased the possibility of this arising. Many also criticized that the government had extended representation only to traditional, mass-based organizations but not to newer groups such as NGOs. The later continued to find it difficult to dialogue with the state. ASONOG, a Honduran NGO based in the Western part of the country, tried to encourage organized groups to form a broad based forum independently of the state, but was unsuccessful. Civil society leaders continued to distrust each other and resist cooperating with others outside the official institutions constructed by the state. This revealed that despite the many advances that had been achieved in terms of citizen participation, civil society had not recovered from the fragmentation and co-optation it had experienced during the preceding two decades. This together with the conservative nature of the Flores government made it possible that recent governance changes might be stalled or reversed under his administration.

**Conclusion**

Honduran civil society underwent a dramatic transformation during the second half of the twentieth century and significantly challenged the exclusionary and state-centered style of governance that predominated in Honduras. Yet, the internal structure of organized groups, the political activities they undertook and the state’s responsiveness to them differed notably from one decade to another (See Table 3.1). A vibrant civil society first emerged in Honduras during the 1950’s when women, laborers and landless peasants began to organize in order to defend their common interests and secure basic political and socio-economic rights. State-centered elites responded to these events by meeting some popular demands, repressing those groups they deemed threatening and
Table 3.1 Honduran Governance During the Late Twentieth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>The Nature of Civil Society</th>
<th>State Responses</th>
<th>Style of Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950’s to the 1960’s</td>
<td>Labor, business, peasant, student and women’s groups emerged and demanded suffrage, basic labor rights, access to land and democracy.</td>
<td>They repressed groups inspired by Communist or Social Christian thought. They also contained the radicalization of organized sectors by granting them some basic demands and encouraging the creation of more conciliatory, parallel groups.</td>
<td>State-centered, exclusionary and repressive. Civil society adopted a confrontational approach to the state and received concessions from it only after significant mass protests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late 1960’s and early 1970’s</td>
<td>Mass-based groups strengthened and demanded an end to partisan politics, and greater state responsiveness to their demands.</td>
<td>Political elites agreed to create a National Unity Government. When this failed, the armed forces launched a period of reformist, military rule which met some popular socio-economic demands.</td>
<td>State-centered and exclusionary. Slightly less repressive. Civil society continued to adopt a confrontational approach to the state. The state tried to pacify these groups by meeting some of their demands in a patronizing manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late 1970’s and 1980’s</td>
<td>Traditional mass-based groups began to fragment. New groups emerged and demanded human rights and democracy</td>
<td>They tried to weaken traditional, mass based groups by repressing and penetrating them. Yet civil society groups were asked to participate in CONASE.</td>
<td>State-centered, exclusionary and repressive. Civil society adopted a confrontational approach to the state but received little in return. However, the state did invite civil society to help draft the electoral laws that guided the return to constitutional rule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late 1980’s and early 1990’s</td>
<td>Traditional mass-based groups tried to reorganize while the newer groups strengthened. They demanded human rights, socially-just economic policies, greater political participation and democratic deepening</td>
<td>They sought civil society’s input and approval on different policies yet simultaneously tried to coopt these groups in order to secure their support for elite-designed policies.</td>
<td>State-centered but less repressive. Punctuated by periods of civil society participation in public decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid to late 1990’s</td>
<td>They remained moderately well organized. They demanded socially-just economic policies, the state’s demilitarization, political participation and democracy.</td>
<td>They created permanent forums that allowed civil society groups to dialogue with each other, develop policy recommendations and maintain a closer level of communication with the state.</td>
<td>State-centered but slightly more participatory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

encouraging the creation of more conciliatory, parallel organizations. Although a few groups were consulted on policy issues during this period, civil society in general was not granted a formal or permanent participation in government. The best and often only way
for them to get their demands heard or met was through mass mobilization and public protests. Although confrontational approach led to important social benefits, it contributed to an unstable political system that was susceptible to constitutional breakdown and military intervention. During the late 1960’s civil society groups began criticizing the Honduran political system and encouraged the creation of a National Unity Government. When this administration proved unresponsive to popular demands, it was deposed by a military coup. The new government contained mass mobilization and postponed demands for democratic governance by meeting popular socio-economic demands. Although this military government was reformist, it did not alter the nature of Honduran governance: the state continued to monopolize political decision-making and maintain a patrimonial relationship with civil society. More conservative military and civilian elites took control of the state during the late 1970’s and 1980’s. They tried to demobilize mass-based groups by repressing them, penetrating them and turning members against each other. Civil society groups maintained a confrontational relationship with the state during this period, but often suffered extreme repression for their activities. Nevertheless, civil society groups were allowed to negotiate the rules of the political game for the first time: they helped draft a new electoral law through their participation in CONASE and thus began a transition to constitutional rule. Civil society also played a crucial role in politics once again in 1985 by helping to resolve the constitutional crisis sparked by Suazo Cordoba’s attempts to extend his presidency.

The traditional, state-centered and exclusionary pattern of governance in Honduras began to change during the 1990’s. Civil society groups began to reorganize while political elites acknowledged the need to expand civil society participation in
government. President Callejas allowed organized groups to help alter existing political institutions through their participation in the Commission for the Modernization of the State. He also promoted a *concertación nacional* wherein he presented policy proposals to civil society groups, allowed them to make recommendations on these and eventually sought their approval of them. Although these forums were used to co-opt and appease popular organizations, they allowed “*un régimen de discusión*”\(^{173}\) to emerge between the state and civil society. Moreover, the fact that the state allowed organized groups to influence the process of institutional design and sought their public policy approval suggests that a new style of governance was developing—one that was more conducive to a democratic political system. Civil society played an even greater role in achieving institutional change during President Reina’s administration. Popular groups and political elites succeeded in demilitarizing the Honduran state and assuring civilian control over the armed forces. They also successfully pressured the government to alter electoral laws so as to enable citizens to elect candidates from different political parties to different government posts. Although civil society was less successful in influencing the government’s socio-economic policies, it was granted a greater amount of representation in government ministries than previously. All of these changes suggest that Honduran governance was continuing to change: it was becoming less state-centric and more dependent on state-society dialogue and negotiation. President Flores’ ascension to the presidency in 1998 brought these recent governance changes into question. Although Flores claimed to support the process of national convergence begun by his predecessors, he did little to support it during his first few months in office. This together with Flores

\(^{173}\) “A regime of discussion” Interview with José Obdulio Fuentes, Secretary General of the Federación de Comités Agropecuarias Diversificadas de Honduras (FECADH), October 26, 1999.
historic tendency to centralize political decision-making made the future development of Honduran governance uncertain. It is within this political context that Hurricane Mitch battered this tiny country of six million people in October of 1998.
CHAPTER 4
NATIONAL-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AFTER MITCH

Introduction

Hurricane Mitch was a landmark event in Honduran political history. It tested the state’s capacity to meet citizen needs, civil society’s ability to collaborate in this endeavor and the political elite’s willingness to respond to popular demands. Although the storm did not destabilize the country’s political system, it did reveal the state’s inability to respond to the disaster or undertake reconstruction on its own. It also highlighted the deficiencies of Honduran democracy and led many to question how it could be improved. This chapter analyzes how national-level governance was affected by both the experience of disaster and the international assistance that followed it. It begins by recounting how the Honduran state and civil society responded to the emergency and interacted with each other during the initial months after Mitch. It then discusses how foreign donors and domestic groups pressured for political change and how the government responded to these challenges.

State and Societal Responses to Disaster

Hurricane Mitch highlighted the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the Honduran state. The military-staffed Comisión Permanente de Contingencias (COPECO), the national emergency management agency, tried warning the Honduran population through the radio, print and TV news about the approaching hurricane for several days before it made landfall. But it was unable to reach or evacuate many of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the country. COPECO responded to the storm as best it could,
relying on eighteen helicopters and twelve small planes for its national-level rescue work. But it was handicapped by a shortage of personnel and equipment. The agency had been weakened throughout the 1990’s as part of a broader political effort to demilitarize the Honduran state. As a result, COPECO’s budget before Mitch was only about $200,000 a year. This enabled the agency to maintain merely two telephone lines and a skeletal staff. These organizational limitations inhibited COPECO’s ability to receive adequate information on the disaster, respond to it effectively or coordinate relief efforts.¹ Although the agency counted on several helicopters and planes, its operations chief was forced to acknowledge just a few days after the storm that it needed twice as many air vehicles in order to manage rescue operations adequately just along the Northern Coast.² President Flores tried to help the agency carry out its emergency work by ordering that the remaining yearly budget allocated for COPECO be transferred to it immediately. In addition, members of the National Congress contributed two days of their salary to the state’s relief work.³ But these funds were unable to overcome COPECO’s institutional problems. Already overburdened with the emergency in the Northern part of the country, COPECO proved entirely unable to confront this natural disaster as floods and landslides spread to the Central and Southern regions of Honduras. The Honduran armed forces tried to respond to the crisis on its own by establishing a command and operations center

¹ Interview with Arturo Corrales, Commissioner of COPECO, Ocotober 19, 1999 and Richard Olson et al., The Storms of ’98: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch - Impacts, Institutional Response, and Disaster Politics in Three Countries. Special Publication #38 (Boulder: Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, University of Colorado, 2001): 44.


They focused on logistical operations such as air rescue and road clearance which they performed together with foreign armed service units. But, their work was hampered by its lack of information on the crisis.

Meanwhile, the floods and infrastructural damage caused by the storm had knocked down telephone lines, blocked roads and prevented several municipalities from contacting COPECO or any other national, government agency to report needs and damages. Consequently, many local governments and communities were forced to undertake relief efforts on their own for a few days to up to three weeks. Fortunately, COPECO had organized and trained both local and regional level emergency committees along the flood-prone Atlantic Coast just a few months before the advent of Mitch. These helped lead local rescue activities during the immediate aftermath of the storm independently of the national level COPECO. Some towns that did not possess local emergency committees immediately organized them in order to coordinate relief work.

Citizens with access to boats and canoes helped rescue neighbors stranded on trees and rooftops. Communities also united to harvest undamaged crops and feed disaster victims through communal kitchens. In many areas, local schools, health clinics and churches were transformed into temporary shelters. Some local leaders whose communities had lost access to even these basic resources overcame incredible logistical barriers to seek outside help. For example, the mayor of Morolica, a small town in the Southern department of Choluteca, traveled approximately 200 miles on foot to Tegucigalpa (a

4 For example see “Inician rescates aéreos y envian ayuda al norte del pais,” La Prensa on the Web, 1 noviembre 1998 found at http://www.laprensahn.com/natarc/9811/n01009.htm

voyage of two days) in order to request national and foreign assistance for his devastated town.  

Although the interruption of the country’s communication and transportation systems inhibited the state’s ability to receive information on and respond to the disaster, national government agencies failed to offer adequate emergency assistance even once these systems were restored. Some isolated communities in the Mosquitia region of Eastern Honduras were unable to contact COPECO until mid-November. During this time, residents, municipal governments and NGOs operating in the region were forced to undertake rescue efforts on their own. Unfortunately, the state did not provide emergency assistance to this region even after it was requested. This lack of government responsiveness prompted communities in this and other parts of the country to bypass the state and seek help directly from foreign governments and charitable organizations. As the mayor of Morolica explained, “If we had waited for the [national] government, the people of Morolica would still be living in tents.”

Private citizens in the capital also began to undertake emergency-related activities in order to compensate for the state’s weakness and inefficiency. Arturo Corrales, a specialist in geographic information systems (GIS) began producing data on Mitch and the disaster it had caused through his company, Ingenieria Gerencial. At the time, this was the only Honduran business capable of managing satellite-based geographic imagery and information electronically. Possessing faxes, computers and multiple phone lines

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6 Ibid, 114.


8 Mayor of Morolica, quoted in López, “Relocating Morolica,” 118.
Ingenieria Gerencial quickly took over the information-gathering job that should have been done by COPECO.\(^9\)

President Flores tried to improve the government’s emergency-response capacity by creating a special and temporary emergency commission on November 1, 1998: the Comisión Nacional de Emergencia (CONE or National Emergency Commission). Corrales and his company became the core of CONE. In fact, most of this commission’s operations were held in the offices of Ingenieria Gerencial. CONE essentially became an emergency information center: it gathered data on the disaster and distributed these to different government agencies. However, CONE did not involve itself with the operational side of recovery work nor did it coordinate relief efforts.\(^10\)

The creation of CONE did little to improve the government’s management of the emergency. The estimated ninety international NGOs and countless local development organizations operating in Honduras were forced to gather disaster information and distribute emergency assistance on their own “because there was no strong, central coordinating agency” to cooperate with them or facilitate their work.\(^11\) Meanwhile, state agencies distributed foreign, humanitarian aid at a painstakingly slow pace to those most in need. Some citizens were still trapped on rooftops two weeks after the storm while many of those housed in temporary shelters did not receive food or other humanitarian assistance for over three weeks.\(^12\) During this period, municipal governments and NGOs

\(^9\) Interview with Arturo Corrales on October 19, 1999.


\(^12\) “Todavía no llega ayuda se quejan en el interior,” *La Prensa on the Web*, 18 noviembre 1998 found at http://www.laprensahn.com/natarc/9811/n18004.htm
responded to the disaster as best they could. The paucity of aid distribution caused many to question the government’s ability to distribute foreign aid efficiently, fairly and with transparency. The Human Rights Commissioner, Leo Valladares, expressed the fear that corruption would hinder the state’s relief efforts and reminded the public that Honduras had been rated as the second most corrupt country in Latin America earlier in 1998.  

The increasing domestic and international concern over the government’s ability to administer aid led President Flores to give the task of receiving, managing and distributing foreign assistance to both Catholic and Evangelical Churches on November 17, 1998. Since the Catholic Church was the largest of these religious institutions, it assumed the bulk of this responsibility. In some areas the Church worked through a strong network of Delegates of the Word and Christian Base Communities while in others it created new community organizations to carry out relief work. Although the Catholic Church had become a key protagonist in the emergency phase, Church leaders represented in the Bishops Council and the CARITAS Council continually stated that the Catholic Church should only cooperate in the emergency and reconstruction process, not manage it. These religious leaders were hopeful that the Church’s work would help strengthen the Honduran state. They believed that the best way to achieve this end was by strengthening civil society and encouraging it to become more active in the emergency and eventual reconstruction process.


15 It is estimated that there were over 10,000 Delegates of the Word in Honduras by the late 1990’s. See Chris Humphrey, Honduras Handbook, (Chico, CA: Moon Publications, 1997): 28.
President Flores, on the other hand, seemed to believe that the best way of responding to the crisis was by centralizing power. On October 29, 1998, just two days after Mitch made landfall, President Carlos Flores declared a state of emergency and ordered the armed forces and National Police to take possession of affected Atlantic Coast areas in order to prevent looting and maintain order. He also began ruling by decree in early November 1998 so that members of Congress could remain in and better assist the communities that they represented. Flores suspended civil liberties (articles 71, 81, 84 99 and 103 of the constitution) on November 3 and imposed a fifteen day curfew lasting from 9PM to 5 AM. Two days later he announced that a group of technocrats had begun drafting a national plan for reconstruction. The government’s work on this document was highly secretive. Few people knew who was working on it or what the plan would entail. Once the Congress was recalled, this legislative body facilitated rather than halted the president’s centralization of power. The Congress approved the executive decree suspending civil liberties and extended the night-time curfew until the end of November. It also quickly approved a bill—the Law for Administrative Facility—submitted by the executive which allowed the president to modify the national budget, determine what state expenditures should be prioritized, bypass regular bureaucratic channels and form a Special Cabinet for National Reconstruction. This institutionalized a highly centralized reconstruction process. On November 25, 1998 the president began to organize his new Cabinet.\textsuperscript{16} This group of five ministers was expected to supervise the development and monitor the implementation of the government’s reconstruction plan.

\textsuperscript{16} The Reconstruction Cabinet was to be composed of the Minister of the Presidency; Minister of Finance, Minister of Public Works, Transportation and Housing; Minister of Agriculture and Livestock; and the Minister of International Cooperation. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Central Bank were designated as special advisors to the new cabinet.
Municipal governments as well as those ministries not represented in the new cabinet were required by law to implement the master reconstruction plan even though they were not guaranteed participation in its design.\footnote{“Conforman Gabinete de Reconstrucción,” \textit{La Prensa on the Web}, 26 noviembre 1998 found at \url{http://www.laprensahn.com/natarc/9811/n260010.htm}} In fact, mayors and congressional representatives found it increasingly difficult to access members of the Reconstruction Cabinet or have any influence on them after Mitch.\footnote{Several mayors and congressional deputies expressed their frustration over this matter in personal interviews with the author in 1999 and 2000.}

Nevertheless, all branches of government and sectors of civil society were expected to do their part to contribute to the recovery effort being directed by the executive. The Honduran Congress began passing a series of laws in late November and early December of 1998 aimed at increasing national economic productivity. It reformed existing legislation on tourism, mining and agricultural in order to foment business investment in these sectors. Congress also passed several other laws that seemed to attack labor and indigenous rights. It suspended for three years part of article 339 of the Labor Code which required that workers be paid double for working on national holidays. In addition, Congress repealed article 107 of the Constitution which prohibited foreigners from owning land within approximately 25 miles of the Honduran border—an area inhabited by several indigenous and Black groups. Private sector representatives were invited to form advisory bodies to the Reconstruction Cabinet and help prioritize projects. Yet labor, peasant and indigenous groups were excluded from this process and, instead,
asked to channel their suggestions on reconstruction through FONAC, a group that was believed to have little influence on the government.19

CARITAS, the Catholic Church’s development agency (Otherwise known as Catholic Charities in the United States), responded to these events by inviting leaders of several civil society organizations to meet in December 1998 and discuss what the process of reconstruction should entail. Several professionals, intellectuals and civil society leaders had been arguing since the onslaught of Mitch that socio-economic and environmental factors had contributed to the country’s recent natural disaster. Informally and through newspaper editorials these individuals argued that that the process of reconstruction should try to transform these pre-existing conditions, not simply rebuild houses and infrastructure. But, there was no structure or unity to these disparate views. Father Germán Calix, the executive director of CARITAS, believes that civil society groups would have united on their own without his group’s intervention. But because CARITAS and the Catholic Church, more generally, were playing such a large role in relief work, he and other Church leaders thought they could facilitate a dialogue among civil society groups and encourage them to begin thinking more formally about reconstruction. The December reunion did not seek to unite all civil society groups in Honduras. In fact, most of the traditional, mass-based organizations in the country were excluded from this meeting. CARITAS merely invited those organizations (most of them NGOs) with whom it had coordinated development projects in the past. The attempt to unite NGOs seemed logical at the time since these groups together with municipal governments were the ones who were performing much of the grass-roots, emergency

work. Meeting attendants formed working groups dedicated to discussing education, health, housing, agrarian reform and other such topics. These brain-storming groups continued to meet on various occasions during the following weeks.

Traditional civil society groups also began to meet at the end of 1998 in order to discuss reconstruction. However, they united through the government-led FONAC—a corporatist group whose activities were partly limited by the executive branch. Members of FONAC drafted a short paper summarizing their views on reconstruction in mid-December. It suggested that the government prioritize meeting basic needs, increasing jobs, diversifying exports, expanding Central American integration and ensuring civil society participation. The FONAC reaffirmed its desire for these goals in another proposal it completed in 1999.

Meanwhile, international donors began working more closely with the Honduran government in order to facilitate the process of disaster recovery. The World Bank established a Central American Emergency Trust Fund with the contribution of several donors in November of 1998 to help countries affected by Mitch continue to make debt repayments. This enabled Honduras to channel the millions of dollars normally spent on repaying foreign loans to relief and emergency work. In December 1998 the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) began coordinating longer-term recovery work by hosting a Consultative Group meeting on the Reconstruction of Central America in Washington, D.C. Representatives from major bilateral and multilateral donors met the

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Central American Presidents here to discuss the region’s needs and coordinate the international community’s commitment to reconstruction. Attendants at this Consultative Group meeting agreed that reconstruction should be seen as an opportunity to pursue a more sustainable development than what had been achieved in the past. They decided that reconstruction should contribute to a broader process of 1) lessening ecological and social vulnerability, 2) reducing foreign debt, 3) achieving greater social equity, 4) promoting decentralization, 5) increasing civil society participation and 6) encouraging good governance.\textsuperscript{22} Another Consultative Group meeting was scheduled for May of 1999 in Stockholm, Sweden. Unlike the December meeting, this second reunion would include civil society groups. Central American governments were asked to present their reconstruction in Stockholm while donors promised to announce their financial commitment to the region there. Donor agencies agreed to send consultants to assist in the development of these reconstruction plans and encouraged civil society to be part of this design process.

**Preparing for Stockholm**

Although participants at the Washington meeting committed themselves to improving the nature of governance in Central America, the Honduran government initially did little to change its authoritarian and centralist tendencies. President Flores replaced Foreign Relations Minister Fernando Martínez in early January of 1999 after he criticized the unproductive nature of the Reconstruction Cabinet and the lack of competitive bidding for new projects.\textsuperscript{23} Martínez claimed that the Reconstruction

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\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Jan Robberts, Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Honduras, October 13, 1999.

\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Fernando Martínez, former Honduran Minister of Foreign Relations, February 28, 2000.
Cabinet tended to act like a coffee break club during this early period: members discussed reconstruction only in abstract terms instead of tackling significant policy matters. Meanwhile, contracts for reconstruction projects were being granted to friends and family members of senior-level political officials. When Martínez suggested that these be subject to public licitation and audited, his recommendations were dismissed. Martínez resigned from the Reconstruction Cabinet in late December 1998 only to be discharged from his ministerial post a few days later. President Flores also exerted greater control over the Honduran Armed Forces—one of the few positive examples of his centralist tendencies. He named Edgardo Dumas as Defense Minister in January 1999—the first civilian to hold this post since the Superior Council of the Armed Forces was dissolved. Dumas curtailed the military’s remaining autonomy by supervising its budget and pension fund. The Flores government also resisted attempts at decentralization. It refused to transfer 5% of the national budget to the country’s municipal governments as mandated by law. Instead, only 1.7% of the 1999 budget (or about $14.7 million) was distributed among these local public entities. The president justified this action by claiming that he had condoned municipal government debts with the Autonomous Municipal Bank and that he needed more funds to direct the reconstruction process. The Minister and Vice Minister of Finance also argued that municipal governments lacked the capacity to administer 5% of the national budget; therefore, they were being


25 Interview with Guadalupe Lopez, Executive Secretary of the Honduran Association for municipalities (AMHON), November 3, 1999 and interview with Arnold David Sanchez, President of AMHON, November 12, 1999.

26 Alcades luchan por obtener el 5% del presupuesto,” *Infopress Centroamericana*, 30 July 1999.
given only what they could manage. The Flores government did agree to allow civil society participation in the drafting of the Reconstruction Plan. But only the FONAC was accepted as a legitimate interlocutor of civil society demands since it assembled all the mass-based organizations in Honduras. Moreover, the government did not assure that it would integrate the proposals submitted by FONAC.

While FONAC worked on its reconstruction proposal, CARITAS convoked a second general meeting of civil society groups in January of 1999. Those present agreed to create a more formal, broad based coalition that came to be known as INTERFOROS. Although CARITAS had encouraged the unification of civil society groups not represented in FONAC, it adopted a less proactive role towards these organizations once INTERFOROS was formed. INTERFOROS was comprised initially of the Foro Ciudadano (Citizen’s Forum), the Foro Social para la Deuda Externa (FOSDEH), the Federación Privada de Organizaciones en Desarrollo (FOPRIDEH), ASONOG (the Asociación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales), CARITAS and various women’s organizations. Several labor, peasant and indigenous groups—some of whom were part of the FONAC—also asked to be incorporated into INTERFOROS in February 1999. By the middle of 1999 INTERFOROS encompassed twelve forums which together represented approximately 575 civil society groups. Some of these organizations had united in December of the previous year to denounce the fact that President Flores continued to rule by decree. As a result of their protests, the president stopped this authoritarian practice at the end of December. Now, these groups joined forces once

again to draft a proposal on reconstruction. The document, which was submitted to the government in mid-March of 1999, emphasized the need to strengthen the country’s democracy, institute citizen controls on government, alleviate Honduras’ foreign debt and develop new agrarian and economic policies that were less detrimental to the poor.

Throughout the group’s formative period, representatives of INTERFOROS tried to meet with government officials in order to expound their views on reconstruction and assist in the design of the master document. But there were limited opportunities for dialogue.

Although some of FONAC’s members also were incorporated into INTERFOROS, these two organizations had little formal contact with each other. The government refused to incorporate the NGOs that formed part of INTERFOROS into FONAC claiming that they were not mass-based organizations. Meanwhile, members of INTERFOROS viewed FONAC as a group that had been coopted by the government and which had little influence on the executive. Indeed, many civil society leaders both within and outside of FONAC explained that the issues that this organization prioritized for discussion were not the same as those that Honduran civil society considered to be most important because the government influenced FONAC’s agenda. For example, although FONAC designed and presented a reconstruction proposal in early 1999, the organization’s resources were channeled to other matters soon thereafter. Members began concentrating on strengthening and deepening FONAC’s internal structure, analyzing the country’s educational system and discussing women’s participation. By diverting attention to these issues, FONAC was limited in its ability to follow through on its reconstruction proposal.

28 Interview with Conrado Lando, Member of the Executive Committee of the Consejo de Trabajadores de Honduras (CTH), November 3, 1999.
The level of dialogue between the state and civil society improved slightly in March of 1999 when the Unidad Nacional de Asistencia Técnica (UNAT), the technical office in charge of drafting the government’s reconstruction plan, offered to meet representatives of INTERFOROS, FONAC and other public and private institutions. Hundreds of people attended this meetings. Unfortunately, UNAT’s meetings were not designed to obtain much citizen input into the content of the reconstruction plan. The government presented an outline of its master plan through slides and overheads. Then those present were allowed to comment on what they had seen. The structure and large number of people in this reunion allowed little room for civil society participation in the decision-making process. However, those present were able to persuade the government to think more about transformation, not merely reconstruction. Based on these general suggestions, the government slightly altered its reconstruction plan (beginning with its title). It then held another meeting with civil society groups in early April 1999 wherein it presented its Master Plan for National Reconstruction and Transformation. The plan estimated that approximately $4 billion were needed to rebuild the country—a sum the government hoped to obtain at the upcoming Stockholm meeting.

Shortly after the government published its reconstruction plan, the Human Rights Commissioner, Leo Valladares, issued a report alleging seventeen cases of foreign aid mismanagement by high-ranking public officials during the immediate aftermath of Mitch. The government responded by harshly criticizing Valladares for tarnishing Honduras’ foreign image and hindering its ability to contract funding. Within days, President Flores sent a bill to Congress (It was formally introduced by a Liberal Party congressman) which proposed reducing the Human Rights Commissioner’s term from six
to four years and limiting his mandate only to investigating cases of human rights abuses. Essentially, this would have prevented the commissioner from investigating cases of corruption. The Congress then dominated by President Flores’ Liberal Party approved the constitutional reform on April 20, 1999 with 28 votes in favor, 26 against and 74 abstentions. Civil society groups responded with outrage. The *Foro Ciudadano*, INTERFOROS and the FONAC, publicly denounced the government’s actions and demanded that the Commissioner’s term and mandate be left unaltered. Meanwhile, several mass-based groups prepared to launch public protest activities. The political influence of Honduran civil society was reinforced by international pressure. Foreign ambassadors and representatives of multilateral institutions met with the President of the Congress and other senior level officials to urge the Congress to reconsider its recent legislative vote. President Flores publicly condemned the recent legal decision. Meanwhile, the President of the Congress promised to reconsider the measure and tried to convince the media that the executive had not proposed the bill. With hundreds of protesters in the streets, Congress unanimously voted to leave the Human Right Commissioner’s term and mandate unchanged on April 27, 1999.29

While in the midst of this political crisis, President Flores tried to polish the government’s image by inviting representatives of the *Foro Ciudadano* to meet with him on April 26, 1999. The *Foro Ciudadano* was composed of distinguished intellectuals who had been lobbying for several years to deepen democracy and reform existing political institutions. The group had not only denounced the Congress’ attack on the

29 The information reported here was obtained from various newspaper reports published in April 1999. See also Jeffrey, “Rhetoric and Reconstruction in Post-Mitch Honduras,” *NACLA: Report on the Americas* 33: 2 (September/October 1999): 28-35.
Human Rights Commissioner. It also had launched a barrage of criticisms against the
government during the preceding months. Moreover, the *Foro Ciudadano* had drafted a
series of recommendations on how to improve the country’s political system and
integrated these into INTERFOROS’ reconstruction proposal. The President most likely
sought to dialogue with the *Foro Ciudadano* instead of the broader INTERFOROS of
which it formed a part because one of its key members, Victor Meza, was his former
legislative advisor. The president may have wanted to use this personal association to
co-opt and pacify the group. Instead, the *Foro Ciudadano* adeptly used its meeting with
the president to pressure the government to commit to a series of reforms. These sought
to 1) ensure transparency in the management of public affairs and resources, 2) increase
both civil society and municipal government participation in public decision-making and
3) reduce Honduras’ social and ecological vulnerability,. The president together with all
the members of the Reconstruction Cabinet committed themselves to pursuing these
goals by signing a seven page declaration on May 20, 1999. President Flores agreed to
add this agreement as a supplement to the Master Reconstruction Plan.\(^{30}\)

Despite this willingness to dialogue with and concede to several civil society
demands, the government continued to ignore INTERFOROS. Representatives of this
group had been unable to meet the president and had had few meetings with members of
the Reconstruction Cabinet. When INTERFOROS submitted its reconstruction proposal
to the government in mid-March, they were told that the Master Reconstruction Plan was
already completed and could not be altered to accommodate their suggestions. The
president’s meeting with the *Foro Ciudadano* caused a rift between this group and

\(^{30}\) Interview with Victor Meza, Members of Foro Ciudadano, October 12, 1999.
INTERFOROS. Members of the later felt that the *Foro Ciudadano* should have asked them to participate in this session. The *Foro Ciudadano* argued that the president had not asked to dialogue with this larger group. Due to this difference, the *Foro Ciudadano* withdrew from INTERFOROS in May of 1999.

Nevertheless, Honduran civil society continued to pressure their government and donor agencies to approach reconstruction with a new vision. Two days before the second Consultative Group meeting was set to begin, Central American NGOs and civil society organizations met with their North American and European counterparts in Stockholm to discuss how they could participate in reconstruction. Those present emphasized the need to transform existing socio-economic and political structures. They suggested that international donor agencies develop multiple follow-up mechanisms to ensure the active participation of civil society groups in the implementation and supervision of reconstruction. They also asked that “effective conditionalities” be attached to the aid offered by these donors so as to reward the governments that developed formal, participatory mechanisms.

The second Consultative Group meeting took place from May 25-28, 1999. Approximately fifteen leaders of Honduran civil society groups attended this event. Most represented traditional organizations such as labor unions, women’s groups and peasant organizations. However, newer groups such as INTERFOROS, the *Foro Ciudadano* and CONPAH also sent delegates. The Honduran government had met with all of these organizations either directly or via FONAC before Stockholm. But its relationship with INTERFOROS remained tense. Moreover, despite its attempts to inform and involve civil society in the reconstruction plan during the early part of 1999, many donors and
civil society groups continued to believe that the government was too closed and centralized. Donors hoped to use this meeting to encourage the Honduran government to continue cooperating with civil society and incorporating its participation in the reconstruction process. As a first step in this endeavor, forums were held on topics such as transparency and good governance, ecological and social vulnerability, decentralization and local development. These offered donor agency, national government and civil society representatives the opportunity to dialogue with each other and exchange ideas about how to achieve the reconstruction and transformation of Central America.¹³¹ Donors also encouraged the Honduran government to improve its level of dialogue with INTERFOROS. At one point in the consultative group meeting, a Swedish representative invited President Flores to his chamber to meet Mauricio Díaz, the head delegate of INTERFOROS. This was the first time the president had agreed to meet with a representative of this organization.³² All of these events sent a clear message to the government that it had to do more to open up to civil society. The Consultative Group meeting ended with the drafting and signing of what is simply known as the Stockholm Declaration. Through it, signatory states agreed to

- Reduce the social and ecological vulnerability of the region, as an overriding goal
- Reconstruct and transform Central America on the basis of an integrated approach to transparency and good governance,
- Reinforce the process of decentralization of governmental functions and powers, with the active participation of the civil society,

³¹ Papers summarizing the results of these and other workshops can be obtained from the IADB online at http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative_group/toc.htm

• Promote respect for human rights as a permanent objective, and give special, attention to the promotion of equality between women and men, the rights of children, ethnic groups and other minorities,

• Coordinate donor efforts, guided by priorities set by the recipient countries, and

• Intensify efforts to reduce the external debt burden of the countries of the region.

The Stockholm Declaration essentially committed Central American governments to advancing three political processes: transparency, decentralization and civil society participation. At the end of this Consultative Group meeting, donors pledged to give Honduras approximately $2.8 billion during a four-year period to finance emergency, reconstruction and transformation programs, as well as debt relief.

**Civil Society Responds to Stockholm**

The Consultative Group meeting in Stockholm reinvigorated Honduran civil society. Surveys conducted at the end of 1999 with thirty-eight leaders of second and third level civil society groups\(^3\) revealed that the organizations they represented were cooperating more frequently with one another than they had done before Mitch (See Table 4-1). Whereas half of those consulted had worked with other civil society organizations only sporadically before the disaster, approximately 47% were doing so on a weekly or bi-weekly basis a year after the storm. A one sample T-test determined that there was a significant difference between the level of intra-group cooperation reported for both time periods (See Table 4-2). Not surprisingly, 71% of those questioned said that it was easier to cooperate with other civil society groups in 2000 than it had been before Mitch. Moreover, nearly 37% of them reported that their organization’s

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\(^3\) First level civil society groups are understood here as community-based groups. Second level organizations represent multiple first level one. Lastly, third level organizations are comprised of several second level groups.
Table 4-1. Reported cooperation among civil society groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How frequently did your organization work with other civil society groups before Mitch?</th>
<th>How frequently has your organization worked with other civil society groups since Mitch?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-weekly</td>
<td>Bi-weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporadically</td>
<td>Sporadically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N=38

Membership had increased after the disaster. Several new civic groups also arose during this post-Mitch period. A recent study of Honduran civil society has reported that 298 second and third level civil society organizations obtained their *personería jurídica* (i.e., legal government recognition) between January 1999 and July 2001. Their yearly rate of inscription was almost twice what it had been from 1991 to 1998. The new numerical strength and unity of Honduran civil society enabled it to challenge the state more vigorously and reinforce international calls for political change.

Table 4-2. One-sample t test comparing reported levels of civil society participation in 2000 with the pre-Mitch period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.773</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.47 Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N= 38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.17 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test value represents the mean of survey participants’ perceptions of how frequently their organization cooperated with other civil society groups before Mitch.

Peasant, labor and indigenous groups, for example, united to form the *Frente Solidario para la Defensa de la Soberanía Nacional*. This *Frente Solidario* sponsored

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several public marches during the later part of 1999 and 2000 in order to protest the damaging effects of some of the pro-business and pro-foreign investor legislation that had been passed by the National Congress after Mitch. Although the government initially ignored the group’s demands, it was forced to change its stance after armed guards fired on and killed several protesters in October 1999 as they marched before the presidential palace. The government entered into formal negotiations with the Frente Solidario after this event and agreed to compensate the families of those injured. In addition, the Congress repealed legislation it had passed in December of 1998 granting foreigners the right to invest along Honduras’ territorial border.

INTERFOROS adopted a less militant though no less challenging stance towards the state. Soon after the Stockholm Consultative Group Meeting it began publishing a weekly newspaper supplement titled “Transformando la Reconstrucción” which was distributed to citizens through leading Honduran newspapers. The supplement informed the public on the government’s progress in transforming existing socio-political structures and challenged citizens to become more involved in this process. INTERFOROS also began working more closely with grassroots organization in various regions of Honduras during 2000 in order to counter accusations that it lacked mass-based support. Two years later INTERFOROS was reorganized to represent eight regional forums instead of twelve issue-oriented ones. This essentially decentralized the group’s decision-making power.35

The FONAC also began organizing local civil society forums during this period in order to channel grass-roots demands and interests more efficiently into its national

35 Comisión Ad Hoc de la Sociedad Civil, Caracterización y mapeo 107.
meetings. It also drafted a development plan in close consultation with regional organizations. The plan, titled *Visión de país y estrategia nacional de transformación para el desarrollo human sostenible (2002-2021)*, is now seen by some as the guiding map for Honduras’ development in the next two decades.

Although civil society organizations exhibited a greater level of cooperation and political activism than they did before Mitch, this cooperative spirit does not seem to have spread to most regular Hondurans. A stratified random sample of 1220 adult residents from ten of the country’s largest cities was selected and surveyed in February 2000 as part of this dissertation research. Approximately one out of every five of these individuals described the level of organization in their community as active both before and after Mitch (See Table 4-3). But, 45.9% of those questioned said that there was little

Table 4-3  Perceptions of community organization before and after Mitch in urban centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Urban Residents Described Community Organization Before Mitch</th>
<th>How Urban Residents Described Community Organization in 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Organization</td>
<td>Active Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Organization</td>
<td>Moderate Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Organization</td>
<td>Weak Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Organization</td>
<td>No Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or no organization in their community and nearly half described their surrounding area in these terms during the pre-Mitch period. A one sample T-test revealed that there was no significant difference in the way urban resident described their communities during both time periods. Survey participants also were divided in their assessment of how easy it was to cooperate with neighbors at the time of the survey: 40.1% described the process as easy while 37.6% said it was difficult. In addition, only 2.5% of them said that it was easier to work with neighbors in 2000 than it had been before Mitch. This reveals that the new cooperation and organization seen among national-level, civic groups was not
extended to regular citizens—at least not to those living in large cities. Municipal case studies presented in later chapters will discuss whether smaller towns had a different organizational experience.

**Donor Pressure for Change**

Foreign donors encouraged the political activism of civil society organizations and reaffirmed their demands by requiring the government’s compliance with the Stockholm Declaration. The IADB tried to promote transparency, civil society participation and decentralization through most of the nearly half a billion dollars in loans it offered Honduras during the three years after Mitch. Almost all of the loans it gave to the central government required participatory mechanisms and some type of social control or auditing. In addition, the IADB channeled nearly $100 million directly to municipal governments or local NGOs.36

Although the World Bank did not condition any of its loans, it encouraged compliance with the Stockholm Declaration through other means. It fomented decentralization by channeling some of its funds to municipal governments through the *Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social* (FHIS or Honduran Social Investment Fund), an institution that it had created during the early 1990’s in order to reduce the economic impacts of structural adjustment on the poor. The FHIS sponsored thousands of grassroots meetings in Honduras during the two years after Mitch so that municipal governments and local residents could identify their needs and prioritize community projects. In addition, the FHIS helped train municipal governments so that they could administer these projects with some outside assistance.

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36 The information in this paragraph is based on an analysis of IADB loans made to Honduras between 1999 and 2001.
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also committed itself to helping Honduras in the reconstruction process. Moreover, it together with the World Bank agreed to consider the country’s eligibility for a debt-forgiveness program under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). But before condoning past loans or funding reconstruction, the IMF required the Honduran government to comply with a series of conditionalities. It asked for the continued application of structural adjustment and social policy reforms as well as the privatization of public service (e.g., telecommunications, airport, port, water and sewage, etc.) agencies. None of these demands were new. The IMF and other multilateral banks had been pressuring for these for over a decade. But Mitch increased their ability to induce such change. The IMF also required that the Honduran government formulate a poverty-reduction strategy, reform the social security system, develop an anti-corruption strategy and improve the country’s judicial system—all of which had to be done with the active participation of civil society groups.

Although all three multilateral donors adopted slightly different means of pressuring compliance with the Stockholm Declaration, they mutually reinforced each other’s efforts for achieving this end. Both the World Bank and the IMF coordinated the HIPC initiative while IADB funds were used to support some of the participatory processes that the IMF required for Honduras to qualify for debt forgiveness. Had the

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Honduran government failed to comply with IMF requirements, it would have lost its eligibility for HIPC and would have risked having future IMF loans suspended. News of this would have spread quickly to the other multilateral banks and would have encouraged them to discontinue their loans to Honduras, as well. Therefore, it really was not necessary for the IADB and the World Bank to attach such stringent requirements to its loans. The IMF did the job for them.

Some bilateral donors were also very forceful in encouraging the socio-political transformation of Honduras. The Swedish Government conditioned all of its $100 million in aid on the Honduran government’s compliance with the Stockholm Declaration.\(^{39}\) The United States, the largest bilateral donor, also supported the principles enshrined in this document. However, it placed special emphasis on the need for transparency, decentralization and greater civil society participation through most of the approximately $300 million it distributed through USAID.\(^{40}\) Much of its aid was channeled to NGOs and municipal governments. Other donors adopted this same tactic to encourage decentralization and citizen participation.

Not all bilateral donors pressured for these changes. The Japanese government, for example, placed no conditions on its aid. It simply supported reconstruction by offering to build seven major bridges in Honduras through Japanese firms. Although they supported the Stockholm Declaration, they did not try to ensure that the principles

\(^{39}\) Interview with Jan Robberts, Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Honduras, October 13, 1999.

\(^{40}\) Interview with a Senior U.S. Embassy official in Honduras who asked that his name not be disclosed, August 26, 1999.
enshrined therein would be fulfilled. Moreover, they did not work with local
government agencies or even contract local business in order to administer their projects.
Bilateral donors tried to offer their aid through channels other than those established by
the central government in part because they doubted the central government’s ability to
administer all the assistance it was receiving. In fact, one senior level official within
the Honduran Foreign Relations Ministry frankly admitted that the government suffered
from an institutional weakness and was overwhelmed by the task of reconstruction. Yet
donor’s decision to transfer aid directly to NGOs and municipal governments was also
made to disperse their area of influence and induce all Hondurans to abide by the
principles embodied in the Stockholm Declaration.

In addition to conditioning reconstruction assistance and transferring it in
decentralized ways, donors decided to oversee the reconstruction process in order to
ensure that it was proceeding according to the principles set forth in the Stockholm
Declaration. The five largest bilateral donors (The U.S., Canada, Spain, Sweden and
Germany) formed an oversight committee (Grupo de Seguimiento) after the May
Stockholm meeting. Japan, the IADB and the United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP) were incorporated into this oversight group after the September 1999
Consultative Group meeting in Madrid, Spain. The World Bank and International

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41 Interview with Takahizo Yamauchi, Second Secretary at the Japanese Embassy in Honduras, August 12,
1999. For information on U.S. reconstruction assistance to Honduras see USAID, “USAID Assistance to

42 Interview with a Senior U.S. Embassy official in Honduras who asked that his name not be disclosed,
August 26, 1999.

43 Interview with a senior Ministry of Foreign Relations official who asked that his name not be disclosed,
August 24, 1999.
Monetary Fund (IMF) later joined in July of 2000. Together, they created three types of oversight committees to supervise reconstruction. At the political level, the ambassadors of each bilateral donor and representatives from the multilateral organizations met about once every one or two months with the Reconstruction Cabinet to discuss how reconstruction was proceeding. Underneath them, a technical follow-up group was formed by the development agencies of the major bilateral donors. These met on a weekly basis with their Honduran counterparts (either the Ministry of Finance, the Secretariat for Technical Cooperation (SETCO) or the UNAT) to analyze the Stockholm Declaration and develop standards for interpreting and applying it. These technical oversight committees helped establish thirteen sectoral groups within different government ministries that were responsible for supervising the actual implementation of projects. Together, these follow-up groups enabled donor agencies to develop a close relationship with each other and jointly pressure the government to abide by the Stockholm Declaration.44

As the presence and influence of foreign donors dramatically increased, so too did their ability to popularize a particular development discourse—one based on concepts such as decentralization, transparency, citizen participation and good governance. The use of such language was not new in Honduras. Foreign donors had been disseminating it since the late 1980’s and 1990’s. Not coincidentally, Honduran social scientists published several books on governance and civil society participation during this

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44 Interview with Fernando Mudarra, Executive Director of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) in Honduras, September 1, 2000 and interview with Duty Greene, Economist for the Project Strategy and Support Office, USAID-Honduras, August 28, 2000.
However, use of these terms were confined to those government officials, intellectuals and NGOs most directly involved with the donor community. This development discourse had not permeated Honduran society in general. Mitch and the subsequent flood of foreign aid to Honduras helped change this. As citizens increased their contact with donor agencies and became more dependent on them for survival, they increased their exposure to the development discourse that these foreign agencies were promoting. Consequently, terms such as governance and transparency that had been used only scantily during the early 1990’s became commonplace after Mitch in both news reports and daily conversation. The popularization of this new development discourse forced government officials to begin thinking of reconstruction in new ways and encouraged civil society to begin judging its government’s performance on the basis of these concepts.

The Government’s Response to Donor and Civil Society Demands

The Honduran government adeptly appropriated the discourse used by donor agencies to show its commitment to the Stockholm Declaration. In order to ensure transparency and involve Honduran citizens in the rebuilding process, the Reconstruction Cabinet sponsored a meeting with civil society groups on August 20, 1999 in Tegucigalpa where it informed participants of the agreements that had been reached in Stockholm. Attendants were told the amount each donor had committed, how much of this aid had been disbursed at that time and when the remaining funds would be distributed. The content of the Stockholm Declaration as well as how the government

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45 For example, see Leticia Salomón, Democratización y sociedad civil en Honduras, (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH: 1994); Leticia Salomón, Julieta Castellanos and Mirna Flores, Ciudadanía y participación en Honduras, (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH: 1996) José Rafael del Cid and Dirk Kruijt, Los pobres cuentan : pobreza y gobernabilidad en Honduras, (San José, Costa Rica : FLACSO, 1997).
proposed to abide by it was discussed as well. The Reconstruction Cabinet committed itself to improving transparency and governance by strengthening the Comptroller General’s office, creating a Project Inspection Agency, training a technical commission on public licitation and periodically informing citizens of how reconstruction was proceeding. It also promised to decentralize the health and education systems and work more closely with municipal governments.\footnote{This information is derived from the author’s personal attendance at this meeting. See also Gobierno de Honduras, \textit{La nueva Honduras tarea para todos: informe de avances en la reconstrucción y transformación nacional}, (Tegucigalpa: Gobierno de Honduras, 1999).} Lastly, the government pledged to involve civil society in new projects by creating the Comisión para la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Proceso de Reconstrucción y Transformación Nacional (CPSC). This was meant to be a temporary organization that would monitor reconstruction projects, advise the Reconstruction Cabinet and complement the FONAC’s work.

As promised in this August meeting, the Flores government made an effort to inform citizens of its reconstruction activities. During the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, the government periodically blocked local television stations during prime time hours and listed projects to be undertaken, noting their cost, location and duration. Although this was meant to increase transparency, these programs revealed just how unaccustomed the government was to this type of public accountability. Rather than present reconstruction in a lively and interesting manner, the government simply displayed a long and seemingly endless list of detailed project information.

The government also took several steps to advance the process of decentralization. President Flores passed a decree towards the end of 1999 transferring 100 million lempiras to municipal governments in order to help fund community
projects. He also promised to transfer an additional 90 million lempiras in 2000. These funds were meant to supplement the national budget transfers made to local governments every year.\footnote{Interview with Arnold Sánchez, President of AMHON, November 12, 1999.} The President also reactivated the Technical Decentralization Unit within the Commission for the Modernization of the State in October of 2000.\footnote{Interview with Mirna Andino, Director of the Technical Unit on Decentralization within the Ministry of Governance, September 2, 2000.} After nearly four years of inactivity, this technical group was asked to submit studies on the advances that had been made in decentralization and suggest additional measures that should be taken to advance this process. Various government ministries were encouraged to support the process of decentralization, as well. The Ministry of Governance began offering municipal governments training so that they could better manage local development projects. In addition, the Ministries of Education, Health, Natural Resources and Agriculture and Livestock began implementing pilot projects on decentralization. For example, the \textit{Proyecto Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria} (PROHECO) gave neglected, rural communities the responsibility of supervising their schools and the authority to request new teachers or principals if the ones that had been assigned to them were not meeting expected standards. Similarly, an agricultural project known as \textit{Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible} (FONADERS) tried to encourage poor, rural communities to identify their agricultural needs and develop the capacity to address these.\footnote{Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG), \textit{Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible (FONADERS), Resumen Ejecutivo}, (Tegucigalpa: SAG, 1999).}

The government also tried to involve civil society in the reconstruction process by creating the \textit{Comisión para la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Proceso de
Reconstrucción y Transformación Nacional (CPSC). The CPSC was composed of two representatives from each of five organizations: the FONAC, INTERFOROS, the Foro Ciudadano, the Consejo Hondureño de la Empresa Privada (COHEP), and the Asociación de Municipios de Honduras (AMHON). Each of these embodied different member groups. The FONAC coalesced most mass-based organizations in the country. INTERFOROS was comprised of several NGOs as well as some traditional, mass-based groups. The Foro Ciudadano bought together leading intellectuals. The COHEP represented Honduran business associations, and the AMHON represented all Honduran municipalities. The fact that COHEP was a member of FONAC but was also granted direct representation in this new commission (a privilege not granted to any other FONAC member) reveals the government’s continued bias towards big business. But, the fact that all of these organizations were allowed to supervise the reconstruction process reveals that the government had been forced to acknowledge that there were other legitimate civil society groups outside of the FONAC.

The CPSC began meeting in October 1999. Initially, the group members tried to determine how they could contribute to the reconstruction process and coordinate tasks among themselves. Carlos Arita Valdiviesco, the government-appointed executive director of this commission, indicated that members tended to distrust each other at first. INTERFOROS still seemed to resent the Foro Ciudadano for the meeting the later group had held with the president immediately before the Stockholm meeting. In addition, the FONAC was hesitant to accept other groups on an equal footing as itself because they lacked the same mass-based support. The commission’s slow and tense

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50 Carlos Arita Valdiviesco, Executive Director of the Comisión para la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Proceso de Reconstrucción y Transformación, September 1, 2000.
start eventually encouraged the *Foro Ciudadano* to withdraw its participation from it. Despite these initial problems, the CPSC continued to meet regularly. By the end of 2000 it had developed a working plan to monitor reconstruction, had made several recommendations on this process and had begun working on the Poverty Reduction Strategy that the government was preparing in order to qualify for the HIPC debt forgiveness program.

The Flores government also adopted less formal means to work with different interest groups. Surveys conducted with Honduran civil society representatives revealed that 84% of the groups they represented had participated in a government-organized forum, commission or consultative group after Mitch whereas only 55% had done so previously. Three quarters of those questioned also reported that they had more opportunities to express their opinions, discuss matters of concern to them and make proposals during late 1999 and 2000 than in the past (See Table 4-4). However, their ability to take a more active role in government projects or policies remained limited. The improved level of dialogue led nearly 58% of the civil society representatives surveyed to believe that their organization had more influence on the state than previously.

Table 4-4. How civil society groups participated in national government forums, commissions or consultative groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Before Mitch</th>
<th>After Mitch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed an Opinion</td>
<td>55% of attendees</td>
<td>82% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed an Issue</td>
<td>53% of attendees</td>
<td>74% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Proposal</td>
<td>50% of attendees</td>
<td>76% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>24% of attendees</td>
<td>26% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Decision</td>
<td>21% of attendees</td>
<td>24% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented a Project</td>
<td>24% of attendees</td>
<td>29% of attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regular citizens also experienced a closer relationship with the state than previously during the year and a half after Mitch. Surveys conducted on urban residents in February of 2000 revealed that 17.4% of those questioned had participated in a *cabildo abierto* or town hall meeting during the fourteen month period after Mitch. However, only 10.7% of them had attended a similar meeting before Mitch. A one Sample T-Test confirmed that there was a significant difference in citizen’s reported level of participation in *cabildos* during both time periods (See Table 4-5). A more extensive national-level survey conducted by Mitchell Seligson in early 2001 revealed that 18.3% of Hondurans had attended *cabildos abiertos* during the previous year.\(^{51}\) This suggests that urban residents sustained the level of political participation observed in 2000. Urban resident also increased their contact with public officials outside of *cabildos abiertos*. Fifteen percent of those sampled as part of this research reported that they had contacted a government official during the fourteen month period after Mitch while only 7.7% of them had done the same before the disaster. Moreover, over 90% of these individuals had contacted either their mayor or some other local official during both time periods. A one sample T-Test once again confirmed that there was a significant difference in the reported level of contact between urban residents and government officials both before and after Mitch.

Table 4-5. One-sample t test comparing urban residents’ participation in *cabildos abiertos* before and after Mitch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Test Value = .11*)</td>
<td>5.779</td>
<td>1186</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.042 - .085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of urban residents’ participation in *cabildos abiertos* before Mitch.

\(^{51}\) The sample had a margin of error or ±1.7% and a 95% confidence level. See Mitchell A. Seligson, “Governabilidad y transparencia en Honduras después del Huracán Mitch: un estudio de opinión ciudadana,” (Casals & Associates, 2001): 70.
Table 4-6  One-sample t test comparing urban residents’ contact with government officials before and after Mitch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Test Value = .077*)</td>
<td>6.892</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.051 Lower .091 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of urban residents’ who contacted government officials before Mitch.

Although the level of organization and cooperation among urban citizens does not seem to have increased beyond the emergency phase, these data suggest that their contact with government officials did improve. Moreover, the fact that citizens sought out local officials seems to support the argument for advancing decentralization.

Although the national government adopted steps to promote transparency and ensure civil society participation in the reconstruction process after the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting, it continued to be plagued by problems of corruption. The Human Rights Commissioner issued a study in April of 1999 wherein it reported receiving 400 citizen complaints of judiciary corruption during the preceding five months.52 Transparency International issued a report the following year that ranked Honduras as one of the most corrupt countries in all of Latin America.53 The United State’s Agency for International Development funded a nation-wide study in 2001 to corroborate these allegations. The study revealed that one in every five Hondurans had been victimized by acts of corruption during the previous year and 62% of them had

52 “CONADES revela corrupción en sistema judicial,” Infopress Centroamérica, 28 April 2000.

come to accept bribery as a means of facilitating bureaucratic transactions.\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps more troubling, this study showed that victims of corruption had less support for the country’s political system, were more indifferent to democracy and had less trust in public officials than those who had not been directly affected by these acts. A separate nation-wide study funded by the World Bank that same year arrived at similar conclusions.\textsuperscript{55} All of these revelations led civil society groups and foreign donors to demand that government corruption be curtailed in Honduras.

President Flores responded to these events by creating a Special Commission of Notables on May 2, 1999 to study problems within the judiciary system and suggest ways of addressing these. Twenty-two representatives from the Congress, civil society and public agencies integrated the Commission.\textsuperscript{56} The Commission of Notables revealed that arrest warrants had been issued to eleven former judges while criminal charges had been brought before another eight of them during 1999. In addition, it reported that Honduran judges had illegally released 800 confiscated vehicles that same year.\textsuperscript{57} The Commission of Notables and civil society groups submitted legislative proposals to the Congress suggesting that the country’s judiciary and electoral system be reformed.\textsuperscript{58}


President Flores also created a National Anti-Corruption Council in February 2001. The group was asked to study and make proposals on how to combat government corruption in general, not just that found in the judiciary system. The Anti Corruption Council is integrated by five civil society and five government representatives and is chaired by Monsignor Oscar Andrés Rodríguez, Transparency International’s Honduran representative. The Anti-Corruption Council gave President Flores an anti-corruption strategy in January of 2002. The plan proposed limiting political immunity for high-ranking political officials, depoliticizing the comptroller’s office and reforming the constitution so that plebiscites and referendums could be used to enhance citizen participation in public decision-making.\footnote{Comisión Nacional Anticorrupción, “Estrategia Nacional Anticorrupción,” unpublished document. Accessed online at http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/honduras/pdf/hon_nat_ac.pdf on March 30, 2003.} Although the Anti-Corruption Council was intended to be only a temporary group at first, domestic and international pressure forced the National Congress to pass a new law that transformed this institution into a permanent one in 2002.

**Foreign Donors and Civil Society Deepen their Cooperation**

While the state took steps to increase citizen participation in government and address problems of corruption, Honduran civil society and foreign donors worked to improve their level of communication and cooperation with each other. Civic groups, for example, played an active role in drafting the World Bank’s five-year Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Honduras at the end of 1999. The CAS outlines the World Bank’s medium-term strategy for promoting development in a country. The Honduran Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Honduras and World Bank representatives traditionally...
had developed the CAS behind closed doors and then kept it from public eye. Honduran civil society groups demanded that this closed decision-making process be changed. Mauricio Díaz, one of the leading representatives of INTERFOROS, approached World Bank officials to request that the CAS be designed in consultation with Honduran civil society. Initially, the Honduran government expressed some resistance to this. But eventually, it together with World Bank officials agreed to draft the CAS in a participatory manner. Dozens of interest group representatives gathered together with World Bank and Honduran government officials in October of 1999 in order to present their recommendations on how Honduras’ development should proceed. The final CAS document reflected many of the recommendations presented by these groups.

Foreign donors also agreed in 2000 to incorporate civil society representatives into the sectoral oversight committees that were charged with monitoring the implementation of reconstruction projects. The sectoral groups enabled donor agencies to develop a closer relationship with Honduran civil society and jointly pressure the government to abide by the Stockholm Declaration. They together with the CPSC also tried to assure that Honduras would not experience the misappropriation of reconstruction funds that was plaguing Nicaragua at the time or that had occurred in Honduras twenty four years earlier after Hurricane Fifi (1974).

Civil society and donor organizations chose to unite further in order to promote Honduran democratization, as well. The *Foro de Fortalecimiento para la Democracia*

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60 Interview with Mauricio Díaz, representative of INTERFOROS, October 21, 1999.

61 Interview with Fernando Mudarra, Executive Director of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) in Honduras, September 1, 2000 and interview with Duty Greene, Economist for the Project Strategy and Support Office, USAID-Honduras, August 28, 2000.
(FFD) was organized in October of 2000 by nineteen foreign embassies, the European Union, the United Nations and thirteen of the most politically-active civil society groups in Honduras. The FFD seeks to ensure that future Honduran governments will commit themselves to promoting the political transformation of their country along the lines envisioned in the Stockholm Declaration. In the short term, the FFD has tried to improve Honduran democracy by fomenting civil society’s participation in government, improving political party competition and encouraging the development of a freer and less corrupt press. Unlike the previously mentioned organizations, the FFD has not limited its work to the reconstruction period, but has adopted a longer-term political focus.62

The Political Consequences of Greater Civil Society Activism and Donor Pressure

Donor agency and civil society pressure have led to significant political transformations in Honduras. First, national level governance has improved in Honduras since Hurricane Mitch. The state has expanded the spaces for the participation of civil society and this sector has come to feel that it is more influential in public policies than in the past. Although civil society has not achieved the same decision-making power as the state, the country has clearly embarked on a path from an exclusionary and semi-authoritarian style of governance to a more participatory and inclusive one.

The development of this more participatory style of governance has facilitated the development of several significant institutional changes as well. The National Congress to reform the Law of Municipalities at the end of 2000 in order to increase the efficiency and political power of local governments. These legislative reforms gave municipal

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governments control over the forests and ejidal lands in their jurisdiction. The Congress also altered the rules through which it selects Supreme Court judges in response to the recommendations it received from the Commission of Notables and other civic groups. Instead of nominating magistrates on the basis of political party recommendations—a highly politicized process—it agreed to choose these individuals from a list of names submitted to it from a new, independent nominating committee. The latter was established on October 15, 2001 and is integrated by representatives of several civil society groups and the Supreme Court of Justice. This new judiciary selection process went into effect in 2002, a few months after the country’s last election. The Congress also responded to political pressure from the FFD and other civic groups to advance political reform. It passed legislation at the end of 2001 replacing the Tribunal Nacional de Elecciones (TNE) with a new, depoliticized electoral agency: the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE). Unlike its predecessor, the TSE is separate from the National Citizen’s Registry (Registro Nacional de las Personas). The Congress also replaced the positions of three presidential designates (designados presidenciales) with that of a single vice president. This has attacked one type of senior-level clientelism and reduced unnecessary government expenditures.

As Honduras prepared for national elections at the end of 2001, the FFD, FONAC, CPSC and other civil society groups jointly pressured presidential candidates to sign a political accord that had they had drafted: the Acuerdo de Transformación Nacional para el Desarrollo Humano en el Siglo XXI. The plan essentially committed signatories to

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63 “Reforman Ley de Municipalidades,” Infopress Centroamericana, 3 November 2000.

64 “Avanza proceso de reformas judiciales,” Infopress Centroamérica, 28 April 2000.
upholding the goals enshrined in the Stockholm Declaration beyond the reconstruction period. Politically, the accord pledges to reform the country’s political system, decentralize power and strengthen the financial and technical capacity of municipal governments. Since its signing, civil society groups have used this document to hold President Ricardo Maduro accountable for his actions and demand that he abide by his political promises.

Domestic and international pressure also has forced the government to make a greater effort to combat poverty and corruption. The Honduran government consulted approximately 3500 civic associations between 2000 and 2001 in order to gain input on how it should design a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). After the document was approved, a poverty reduction fund was created in April 2002 with the monetary transfers that had been destined to repay newly-condoned foreign loans. Although different government agencies are charged with executing the PRS, their work is supervised and counseled by a new Poverty Reduction Consultative Group formed in September 2002. The group is integrated by five civil society and several local and national government representatives. Thus far, this Consultative Group has developed a methodology for monitoring and evaluating the PRS in a participatory and decentralized manner and has begun testing this methodology through a pilot poverty reduction program.

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65 The accord can be accessed online at http://www.ffd.hn/declaraciones.htm

66 “Sociedad civil exige que Maduro cumpla promesas,” Infopress Centroamericana, 16 agosto de 2002.


68 Comisión Técnica, Consejo Consultivo de la Estrategia para la Reducción de la Pobreza, “Propuesta de Plan de Trabajo del Consejo Consultivo de la Estrategia para la Reducción de la Pobreza,” internal memo, March 2003.
The Anti-Corruption Council’s strategy for combating government fraud and illicit behavior also has been integrated into President Ricardo Maduro’s plan of government. Although it remains to be seen whether this plan will achieve its objective, the Prosecutor's Office has filed several charges against public officials for fraud and the misappropriation of government funds. Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Council has continued denouncing acts of corruption and monitoring the implementation of its proposal.

**The Limits to Transformation**

Notable political changes have transpired recently in Honduras as a result of donor and civil society cooperation and demands for change. Nevertheless, there have been significant limits to what has been achieved. Although civil society has been given a greater voice in government, its ability to make decisions on, supervise or implement projects continues to be limited. The Participation Commission, for example, was allowed to become involved in the reconstruction process at a conceptual level. But the group was rarely given detailed information on the adjudication and implementation of particular projects. What little project-specific information it did receive was fragmented and, in some cases, incomplete. Corruption also continues to plague the Honduran state. Although steps have been taken to remedy this problem, it is doubtful whether

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70 “Honduras Corruption: Honduras Officials to be Charged with Corruption,” *EFE News Services* 21 April 2002.

71 INTERFOROS, “Informe del espacio INTERFOROS sobre su participación en la Comisión de Participación de la Sociedad Civil y valoración de sus avances en reconstrucción y transformación nacional,” presented at the Consultative Group Meeting held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 7-8 February 2000.
political corruption has diminished significantly since Mitch. The process of
decentralization also has been limited. The national government has offered local
officials training and has allowed both them and their communities to make limited
policy decisions through pilot projects. But most of the critical decisions related to
health, education, agriculture and public infrastructure continue to be made by the
ministries responsible for these sectors. The central government also refuses to give
municipal governments the financial tools they need to spearhead their own local
development. This intransigence led AMHON to file a lawsuit against the central
government towards the end of 1999 demanding that it give municipalities the legally
mandated 5% of the national budget as well as pay arrears for the funds that had not been
transferred to them since 1991.72 President Flores threatened to use his political influence
to lock the case in the court system until the end of his administration. He also decided to
punish this legal action by rescinding his offer to disburse 90 million lempiras to
municipal governments in 2000.73 Although President Ricardo Maduro has promised to
give municipal governments the 5% of the national budget that is mandated by law, he
has failed to comply with this promise as of early 2003.

Several factors help explain why Honduras’ socio-political transformation has not
been more extensive. First, neither the Flores nor the Maduro government have been
committed to radical, political change. Those measures that have been adopted to promote
transparency, decentralization and citizen participation were undertaken as a result of
significant domestic and international pressure. Moreover, many of these measures were

72 “Demandan al estado por incumplimiento en entrega de fondos municipales,” Infopress
Centroamericana, 11 February 2000.

73 Interview with Arnold Sánchez, President of AMHON, November 12, 1999.
limited to a short time horizon. The CPSC, for example, was supposed to ensure civil society’s involvement in reconstruction. Therefore, it was dissolved once this process was completed. Although theorists have suggested that post-disaster reconstruction requires several years to undertake, Honduran government officials determined the length of this process on the basis of foreign funding for it—a period lasting approximately three years or until the end of President Flores’ term in office.

Civil society participation in government beyond this period has been limited by conflicting understandings of what this process entails. The Honduran government tends to view participation as merely the act of granting a voice to civic groups. The latter, on the other hand, tends to have a more expansive view of participation, believing this should entail the ability to make decisions and implement projects or policies. This disjuncture between the way the state and civil society interpret participation has limited the level of recent political openings and reduced civil society’s satisfaction with this process.74

Honduran civil society also continues to be plagued by internal division and a lack of institutional capacity. Some of the founding members of INTERFOROS have withdrawn from this organization in order to pursue their own agenda, and the Frente Solidario para la Defensa de la Soberanía Nacional has ceased to exist. Fernando Mudarra, head of the Spanish Cooperation Agency, noted that those civic groups who participated in the sectoral oversight committees to monitor reconstruction were not well consolidated. Each wanted to do its own thing and there was little cooperation among

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74These conclusions are based on interviews with dozens of civil society leaders and Honduran government officials during 1999 and 2000. A similar assessment is presented in Comisión Ad Hoc de las Sociedad Civil, *La sociedad civi*, 100.
them. Carlos Arita Valdiviesco, executive director of the Civil Society Commission, said his group was hampered by similar problems. This divisiveness is aggravated by the fact that many third level civil society groups—the civic organizations that most frequently dialogue with the state—tend to act autonomously from its members. This has led some analysts to question the representative nature of these organizations.

Honduran civil society also suffers from a lack of technical capacity. This is particularly the case with traditional, mass-based groups (labor unions, peasant cooperatives, etc.). Although these organizations have a high capacity for mobilization, they are unaccustomed to negotiating with state officials and designing well formulated proposals. Mudarra noted that those groups who participated in the sectoral oversight committees lacked the technical capacity to undertake project or policy decisions on an equal footing with the state. Former U.S. Ambassador Frank Almaguer expressed a similar sentiment. This partly explains why the Honduran government has been so hesitant to increase civil society participation in decision-making processes in the past.

Carlos Arita Valdiviesco offered a slightly different perspective. According to him,

_Mas de un problema de falta de capacidad de gestión hay una desarticulación institucional tanto en el gobierno como en la sociedad civil ... Existe capacidad pero para cuando cada quien este haciendo lo suyo. ... El problema es que no ha habido una cultura de participación en Honduras si no que una de confrontación. Entonces se están dando los primeros pasos para una cultura distinta._

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75 Interview with Fernando Mudarra, Executive Director of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) in Honduras, September 1, 2000.

76 Cruz y Espinoza, _Caracterización y mapeo_, 105-106.

77 Interview with Fernando Mudarra, Executive Director of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) in Honduras, September 1, 2000.

Indeed, Hondurans have had little experience with political participation. Most of the political goals that were secured by mass-based groups in the past were achieved only after intense mass mobilization and public protests. The transition from a culture of confrontation to one of cooperation and accommodation can not be a rapid or easy one. But, if the recent shift in state-civil society relations continues, Hondurans can acquire the skills needed to secure a deeper and more participatory democracy.

Foreign donors also may have done more to promote the socio-political transformation of Honduras. Instead of demanding in abstract terms that the government decentralize, have greater transparency and increase civil society participation, donors should have outlined what specific steps should have been taken to achieve these goals. For example, they could have demanded that the central government abide by the Law of Municipalities and transfer 5% of its budget to municipal governments. They also could have required that civil society and municipal governments participate in the oversight and auditing of reconstruction projects. This level of specificity is not uncommon. After all, the IMF conditioned some of its post-Mitch loans on the privatization of government agencies and the implementation of specific economic policies. Foreign donors also should have demanded that permanent political-institutional changes be adopted. Instead they required only that reconstruction be carried out in compliance with the Stockholm Declaration. Yet even these conditions were not carried out. This is because donor agencies were more interested in monitoring how the government was progressing on the issue of reconstruction than on that of transformation.79 Consequently, the Honduran

79 This view was expressed by Duty Greene, Economist for the Project Strategy and Support Office, USAID-Honduras, August 28, 2000 and Jan Robberts, Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Honduras, October 13, 1999.
government was able to claim compliance with their conditions by establishing a handful of new commissions and projects but keeping the institutional structure of government relatively intact. Although this has improved the style of governance in Honduras and resulted in significant institutional changes, Honduras has not achieved the structural transformations envisioned in the Stockholm Declaration.

**Conclusion**

The infant literature on the politics of disasters suggests that a country may experience significant political changes after unforeseen crisis events. However, it does not specify how these transformations might arise or precisely what causes them. The case study presented here suggests that natural disasters can prompt political shifts by highlighting the deficiencies of a state, animating civil society and increasing both domestic and international pressure for political reform. It also reveals that donor agencies may further promote these transformations by conditioning their aid, disseminating a development discourse and indirectly encouraging civil society’s organization and political activism. Resultant political changes, however, do not seem to represent a radical break with the past. Rather, this case suggests that both a disaster and donor pressure tend to hasten political and organizational processes that were already underway.

Initially, the Honduran state tried to respond to Hurricane Mitch in a highly centralized and exclusionary manner. This threatened to reverse many of the advances that had been made during the previous decade in terms of democratic governance. But the state was unable to confront the emergency on its own. Fortunately, the onslaught of Mitch revitalized many civil society groups in the country. NGOs, municipal governments and regular citizens also became active in the relief effort. Within a month
of the disaster the government had given local churches the task of managing and
distributing foreign emergency assistance. The state then turned its attention to the
longer-term task of reconstruction. The Catholic Church capitalized on its new
leadership role by encouraging NGOs in the country to organize and begin to think about
reconstruction. Meanwhile, traditional, mass-based groups began to unite and tackle this
same issue through the government-led FONAC. All of these responses were based on
pre-existing patterns of organization and political conduct: the state relapsed into its
traditional, authoritarian and exclusionary pattern of governance while Honduran civil
society reverted to a level of organization and political activity reminiscent of earlier
decades. The problem was that both of these groups were trying to (re)establish different
patterns of governance. During the few months after Mitch it was still unclear whether
the country would regress into a closed, centralist and authoritarian style of governing or
whether an open and participatory style of public decision-making would prevail.

Foreign donors helped determine which style of governance was constituted after
Mitch. They helped draft the Stockholm Declaration—a document that committed the
Honduran government to increasing citizen participation, promoting transparency,
deepening decentralization and generally promoting good governance. Foreign donors
also pressured the national government to comply with these measures by attaching a
series of conditionalities to their economic assistance, channeling part of their aid to local
governments and NGOs and disseminating a development discourse that emphasized the
need for political reform. All of this reinforced civil society’s activism and demands for
democratic deepening. Together, the combination of this domestic and international
pressure forced the national government to continue improving the democratic style of
governance it had begun to implement during the early 1990’s. Although the Honduran government failed to implement many of the institutional reforms that both donors and civil society were hoping to achieve, it did create several spaces for citizen participation and institute significant institutional reforms. All of this represented important steps toward the deepening of Honduran democracy. Civil society’s renewed political activism as well as the recent popularization of a development discourse based on the concepts of participation, transparency, decentralization and good governance suggests that Honduran society may continue to pressure for greater political change on its own once the political influence of international donors has waned. The following chapters will discuss whether the experience of disaster and foreign aid had the same positive effects on municipal-level governance as were noted at the national level.
CHAPTER 5
INTRODUCING MUNICIPAL CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The research in Tegucigalpa suggested that the traditional pattern of governance in Honduras had continued to become more participatory and inclusive after Hurricane Mitch. Civil society groups became more organized and politically active while the central government showed a greater willingness to respond to citizen demands. Several formal structures were established in order to facilitate a continual dialogue between these two groups. These governance changes, in turn, led to some significant institutional changes. What was difficult to determine was whether this political shift had been induced by the experience of disaster, the intervention of foreign donors or a combination of both of these factors. A focus on national level politics alone would not allow these variables to be controlled and individually tested. In addition, it provided only a partial view of how Honduran society had responded to these events. After all, most of the country is dramatically different from the politically-centered world of Tegucigalpa. More research was needed to analyze whether and why any socio-political changes had occurred locally.

It was hypothesized that if Honduran governance had changed, it had occurred in at least a three step process. First, either Hurricane Mitch and/or the intervention of foreign aid agencies had encouraged citizens to unite and become more organized. This is a phenomena that had occurred among leading civil society groups in the country and which the academic literature reviewed in chapter two had suggested would occur among
disaster victims. Second, a heightened level of organization was expected to prompt greater citizen involvement in politics. As the literature on civil society asserts, socially cohesive population groups tend to be more politically active. This political activism leads, as we saw in our national-level analysis, to a greater dialogue between citizens and their government and, thus, to an improvement in governance. The following diagram illustrates visually how governance changes were thought to have arisen in Honduras.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5-1 Theorized causes of governance change

Four hypotheses were developed with the process illustrated above in mind.

H₁: A major natural disaster causes disaster victims to become more organized.

H₂: External aid organizations who encourage greater community organization cause target groups to become more organized.

H₃: A more organized citizenry will become more politically active.

H₄: A politically active citizenry promotes a participatory kind of governance.

The first two hypotheses were used to select cases in which to observe how expected socio-political changes had occurred. The municipality of Sabá in the department of Colón was chosen for study because it was severely impacted by Hurricane Mitch and received post-disaster assistance from agencies who required community participation in their projects. Potrerillos, Cortés was also selected because it suffered the effects of a natural disaster yet did not receive much support from external aid.
Table 5-1 Selection of municipal case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1 Experienced a Disaster</th>
<th>H2 Has Received External Aid that Encourages Community Organization</th>
<th>No H2 Has Not Received External Aid that Encourages Community Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabá, Colón</td>
<td>Potrerillos, Cortés</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No H1 No Disaster</td>
<td>Dolores Merendón, Ocotepeque</td>
<td>San Marcos, Ocotepeque</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

organizations after this event. Although Potrerillos did have two NGOs working in its territory, both of these had been sponsoring programs for several years beforehand. Therefore, their continued presence in the area did not represent a significant change in outside agency support. Dolores Merendón in the department of Ocotepeque was chosen in order to test the second hypothesis. It was one of the few municipalities in Honduras that received significant development assistance in the aftermath of Mitch despite having suffered only minimal damage due to this storm. All of the NGOs that were working in this municipality encourage residents to be well organized and work jointly on community projects. Lastly, San Marcos, Ocotepeque was selected as a control case. This municipality was neither afflicted by a natural disaster nor received new NGO support after 1998. Therefore, it was expected that no significant change in governance had occurred there. San Marcos also stood as one of the best examples of good, local level governance in Honduras immediately before Mitch. A United Nations program implemented here during the early 1990’s noticeably altered and improved relations between the local government and its citizens. Consequently, in addition to being a
control case, San Marcos was expected to provide some indication as to whether and how much governance had improved in the other three cases since Hurricane Mitch.

Despite the careful selection of case studies, it is recognized at the onset that it will not be possible to determine definitively the relationship between the dependent and independent variables proposed here. Although each of the selected municipalities represents a different combination of $H_1$ and $H_2$, their environment can not be controlled so as to test our hypotheses perfectly. A host of other factors may have affected the way the residents of these regions have responded to our independent variables. This chapter will take four such factors into consideration: the geography, poverty, economic production and organizational history of these regions. Although attention to these issues will give us a richer and more in depth understanding of our municipal cases, it will also complicate our efforts to determine why certain socio-political changes may have arisen in these localities since Mitch. This richness has been chosen at the expense of simplicity, however, because it offers us a better understanding of the complexity of social interactions. With these caveats in mind, it is hoped that the following analysis will improve our understanding of whether and why Honduran governance has changed in the aftermath of Mitch.

**Potrerillos**

Potrerillos covers an area of 83.3 km$^2$ in the Department of Cortés. Most of the municipality is located in the Sula Valley and is dissected by two major bodies of water, the Humuya and Blanco Rivers. Potrerillos is located in the development corridor of Honduras, an area that runs from Puerto Cortés on the Caribbean Coast to the Gulf of...
Fonseca on the Pacific.¹ One of the main highways in the country also runs through this municipality, making access to the two largest cities in Honduras relatively easy. San Pedro Sula is only about an hour drive away, while the capital can be reached in two and a half hours by car.

Despite its centrally located position, Potrerillos is not a wealthy region. The Honduran Government’s Presidential Commission on State Modernization reported in 1994 that approximately 30% of the population here was malnurished and lacked access to basic health services while another 25% did not have access to potable water.² A more recent report by the FHIS suggests that the level of poverty in Potrerillos is worse than what was estimated previously. According to FHIS, 50% of the population of this municipality suffered from malnutrition in 1995, 36% did not have access to basic health services in 1996, 25% did not have potable water in 1988 and 58% were illiterate in 1988.³ Using this updated information, the FHIS classified Potrerillos as a municipality with a moderate level of poverty, compared to that of other areas in the country.

Despite the poor level of health, sanitation and education in Potrerillos, the households here were constructed better than those found in many other municipalities of comparable size. Three hundred sixty nine out of the approximately 2860 houses in

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¹ This development corridor is considered to cover the area of land a few miles on either side of the road that runs from Puerto Cortes to Tegucigalpa and the one that runs from Tegucigalpa to Choluteca on the Pacific Coast.


Potrerillos were selected at random as part of this dissertation research. One adult member from each of these households was interviewed in January and February of 2000. Survey participants were asked to describe the houses they lived in when Mitch struck the area. More specifically, they were asked to describe the dominant floor and wall material in their homes, the number of rooms in it and whether the house was owned or rented. These survey data revealed that most of the houses in Potrerillos tended to be small before Mitch: 37% of them were single room structures, 25% of them were two room structures, 18% were three room structures and 14% had four or more rooms. Despite their small size, these houses seem to have been built well. Sixty three percent of the houses in Potrerillos before Hurricane Mitch had concrete walls, and another 71% had concrete floors. Approximately on fifth of them had dirt floors and wooden walls.

These household level data was used to develop a poverty index for Potrerillos. The poverty index was derived by simply adding the coded responses of the number of rooms, wall and floor material that composed the houses where our survey participants lived before Mitch. The responses for the type of floor material in each house were coded as follows: dirt floor = 1, wood floors = 2, cement floor = 3 and tile floor = 4. The responses for the type of wall material in each house were coded as follows: perishable goods = 1; wood, adobe or cane = 2 and concrete = 3. In order to obtain a poverty index, the coded numbers for each of these three variables were added. If the survey participant’s family rented the house they lived in before Mitch, one point was subtracted from the sum while if they owned the structure nothing was done to alter the equation. In other words, the poverty index formula was derived as follows:

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4 Please refer to Appendix A for more detailed information on how this sample size was determined and how surveys were gathered.
Poverty Index = Floor Material Code + Wall Material Code + Rooms Code (-1 if renting)

The poverty index values ranged from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 13. Using this method, it was determined that the mean poverty index in Poterillos was 7.30 with a standard error of 0.11. This corroborates the national government’s classification of poverty in Potrerillos when Mitch struck. These survey data further revealed that the poverty in this municipality is of a semi-urban nature. Only 25% of the sampled households were located in rural neighborhoods before Mitch, and a mere 10% owned farms, suggesting that less than half of the area’s rural population depended on family farming for subsistence when the floods struck.

The surveys collected in Potrerillos also revealed that most residents here had had limited access to education. Twenty-three percent of those interviewed said they had never received formal schooling. Another 36% had received but not completed a primary school education, making it likely that many of them were not fully literate. Only a quarter of those surveyed had completed sixth grade and less than 5% had received post-elementary schooling. This data seems to corroborate the national government’s report that 58% of the municipality’s population was illiterate in 1988.

Poterillos has been integrated into the national and international world economy since the early part of the twentieth century. During the 1910’s the Honduran Government extended the National Railroad, whose construction had begun in 1868 at the northern Port of Cortés, to Potrerillos.\(^5\) This transformed this town into a major commercial and transportation center. All products and passengers that needed to reach

the capital from the Northern coast traveled on the National Railway to Potrerillos. The municipality remained an important commercial center until 1958 when a paved road connecting Puerto Cortés to Tegucigalpa was completed, making it unnecessary for travelers to stop in this municipality.6 In 1920 a subsidiary of the Cuyamel Fruit Company, one of the four main banana producing companies in Honduras at the time, was granted the right to administer the National Railroad. This together with the boom in Honduran banana production during the 1920’s7 made Potrerillos an attractive site for banana cultivation.

Potrerillos did not become a typical, banana-producing area, however. From the 1920’s to the 1950’s bananas were not produced as extensively here as they were in other areas of the country. While Puerto Cortés, San Pedro Sula, El Progreso and San Manuel (later La Lima) all had between 2000 and 4000 hectares of land cultivated with banana in 1952,8 this fruit never occupied more than 2000 hectares in Potrerillos between 1952 and 1974.9 Land tenure patterns here also were quite different from those of the previously mentioned cities. The land in larger, banana producing areas had come under almost complete control of the banana companies during the first half of the 1900’s.10 However,

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10 In other parts of the country, fruit companies had obtained extensive track of land in exchange for constructing railroads. During the late 1800’s and early 1900’s the Honduran State granted companies
much of the territory in Potrerillos remained in the hands of Honduran farmers until the late 1940’s.11 In addition, banana companies did not intervene as directly into the agricultural production of the area as it did in larger, banana producing regions.

Although the Cuyamel Fruit Company (purchased by the United Fruit Company in 1929) had begun acquiring land in Potrerillos during the 1920’s, neither they nor UFCO directly brought this land into production during the first half of the 1900’s as they did in other areas of the country. Instead, these companies granted local farmers usufruct rights to their property so that they would clear and cultivate bananas on it. Many of the local, large and medium-scale farmers here also engaged in banana production during this period. They, like the usufruct farmers, cultivated and transported this fruit to the National Railroad station in the urban heart of Potrerillos. The Cuyamel and later United Fruit Company bought their fruit and supplied the farmers with the fertilizers and equipment they required to continue producing it. The relatively moderate level of banana production in Potrerillos during the first half of the twentieth century kept population levels low here relative to other banana producing regions. Until 1945 Potrerillos had less than 2000 inhabitants or 400 houses.12

250+ hectares of land for every kilometer of railroad they built. See Vilma Lainez and Victor Meza, “El Enclave Bananero en la Historia de Honduras,” Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (mayo-agosto 1973): 142; Antonio Murga Frasinetti, Enclave y Sociedad en Honduras (Tegucigalpa: UNAH, 1978): 63-66; Filander Diaz Chavez, Analisis Critico de las Condiciones Tecnicas de los Ferrocarriles de la Standard Fruit Company (Tegucigalpa: Editoriales Liberacion Nacional, 1973): 22; and Frank Ellis, Las Transnacionales de Banano en Centroamerica, traduccion del ingles por Juan Mario Castellanos (San Jose: EDUCA, 1983): 63-69. The Cuyamel Fruit Company did not acquire land in Potrerillos through these means because the national government constructed the few miles of railroad inside and just to the north of this municipality. This enabled smaller, national farmers to maintain or acquire land in this municipality with greater ease than in other areas of the country.

11 This information was obtained from interviews with local residents of Potrerillos in January and February 2000.

12 Municipalidad de Potrerillos, Informe del Primer Censo Comunitario.
UFCO began promoting the expansion of banana production in Potrerillos during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. This process was facilitated by Juan Manuel Galvez’ rise to presidential power in 1949. Galvez had been a lawyer for both the Cuyamel and the United Fruit Companies and unashamedly helped advance the interests of both.\(^\text{13}\) In 1952 the national government granted UFCO direct control of the National Railroad, which had been managed by UFCO’s subsidiary, the Cuyamel Fruit Company, for the previous twenty two years.\(^\text{14}\) The national government also agreed to finance the extension of the National Railroad a few miles southwest to a property UFCO owned in Higuerito, an area deeper into the heart of Potrerillos.\(^\text{15}\) The new railroad expansion traversed most of the fertile land in this municipality. Foreseeing the new political opportunities in the country, UFCO began purchasing much of the land in Potrerillos during the late 1940’s that had until then been owned by Honduran farmers. By 1952, farm land in the area had become just as concentrated into a few, large holdings as it had in other, banana producing areas. Approximately 4% of the farms in Potrerillos occupied 67% of the land there in 1952 while in San Manuel, San Pedro, El Progreso and Puerto Cortes three to seven percent of the farms occupied 60-77% of the farm lands.\(^\text{16}\)

UFCO did not directly cultivate bananas on all the new territory it acquired in Potrerillos during the Galvez period. Instead, it parceled some of this land into plots ranging from 45-60 hectares in size and granted it to 120 of its most experienced

\(^{13}\) Buchard, *Poder político, interés bananero*, capítulo II.


\(^{15}\) Ibid.

employees through a raffle.\textsuperscript{17} UFCO constructed the houses and basic infrastructure (roads, electricity, etc.) these people needed to establish new communities. In addition, it supplied these new farmers with the pesticides and machinery they required to cultivate bananas. The independent banana growers’ previous experience working on UFCO plantations enabled them to replicate the technology and methods of cultivation used by this company. This together with the expansion of the National Railroad allowed UFCO to extract greater quantities of bananas from Potrerillos while ensuring that the fruit suffered less damage during transportation than previously.

The distribution of land by UFCO together with the cultivation of new banana plantations provoked a massive migration of people to Potrerillos. From 1945 to 1950 the population of the municipality more than doubled from 2018 to 4127 residents.\textsuperscript{18} Sixty five percent of these people settled in rural areas.\textsuperscript{19} Unlike other banana producing regions of the country, however, a minority of the agricultural workers in Potrerillos were rural proletariats during this period. Out of the total 627 registered agricultural workers here in 1952, only 38\% of them received a salary for their work.\textsuperscript{20} The remainder most likely lived from the sale of their crops or from subsistence agriculture.

During the 1970’s the national government helped agricultural workers in Potrerillos have greater access to land and diversify their crop production. In December 1972, just twenty two days after launching a \textit{coup d’etat}, the military-populist

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} This information has been obtained through interviews with local residents.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Municipalidad de Potrerillos, \textit{Informe del Primer Censo Comunitario} and DGEC, \textit{Censo General de Población 1950}, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} DGEC, \textit{Segundo Censo Nacional Agropecuario 1965-1966}, 198-199.
\end{itemize}
government of Oswaldo López Arellano pronounced Decree Law #8 which temporarily allowed peasants in the country to occupy and begin cultivating either national or unused, privately-owned lands. Two years later an agrarian reform program was initiated through Decree Law #170. Both led to the distribution of 989 hectares of land to ten peasant groups in Potrerillos (See Table 6-1). The Instituto Nacional Agrario (INA or National Agrarian Institute) encouraged all of these farmers to cultivate basic grains and motivated half of the reform groups to cultivate non-traditional export crops such as sugar cane and pineapples. Despite government efforts to encourage the diversification of agricultural production in Potrerillos, banana remained the dominant crop in the area. The last agricultural census reveals that 685 hectares of land here were cultivated with banana in 1974 while only 170 hectares were cultivated with sugar cane and another 14 hectares with pineapples. Banana remained the main crop produced in this municipality until the mid 1990’s when the independent banana growers in the area began cultivating sugar cane on a mass scale.

The population of Potrerillos began relying less on agriculture and more on industry during the 1990’s. The nearby municipality of Villanueva became one of the country’s largest industrial processing zones in the early 1990’s. Garment assembly plants or maquiladoras were the main types of industries that were established here. In

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21 For a discussion of both laws and their effects see Instituto Hondureño de Desarrollo Rural (IHDER), 84 Meses de reforma agraria del gobierno de las fuerzas armadas de Honduras, (Tegucigalpa: IHDER, 1980): 77-102.

22 See INA, Información Básica de los Grupos Campesinos de la Reforma Agraria, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1994).


24 This information was obtained from interviews with local residents.
1993 the *maquiladora* industry in Villanueva had grown to employ 2803 people.\(^{25}\) The industry and its demand for labor continued to expand dramatically during the next few years. By 1996 the *maquiladoras* in this town employed approximately 50,000 people.\(^{26}\) Most of this industry’s workers are women.\(^{27}\) The residents of Potrerillos have benefited greatly from this boom in garment assembly plants. Although no one knows precisely how many people from Potrerillos work for the *maquiladoras*, buses transport hundreds of residents from this municipality to the industrial processing zone in Villanueva on a daily basis. Potrerillos’ increasing reliance on *maquiladoras* rather than agriculture has altered the rural to urban population distribution here. By 1994, when the most recent census was taken, 72% of the 13,053 residents of Potrerillos lived in urban centers.\(^{28}\) The advent of disaster promised to increase further the degree of urbanization and proletarianization in this municipality. The three, formerly rural communities that were housed in temporary shelters after Mitch were forced to relocate to areas near the urban heart of town in 2000 so that they would be less vulnerable to future flooding.

**Sabá**

Sabá shares some of the same characteristics as Potrerillos. The municipality is located in the department of Colón in one of the country’s largest and most fertile valleys, the Aguán Valley. The Aguán River together with several of its tributaries cut through

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and encircle Sabá. This municipality encompasses a greater area of land—370.0 km²—and has a larger population than any of the other municipalities under study. According to the 1988 national census, the last population census taken in Honduras, Sabá had slightly over 15,000 inhabitants, two thirds of which lived in rural areas. The Honduran government estimates that the population of the region should have grown to about 16,576 in 1995. However, municipal authorities believe that the population here is greater than this, having reached a figure of approximately 25,000 people by 2000.

Poverty indicators in Sabá are comparable to those found in Potrerillos. The Honduran Government’s Presidential Commission on State Modernization reported in 1994 that 32% of the residents of Sabá lacked access to basic health services and potable water. In addition, 37% of the people here were malnourished in 1995. Yet the population of Sabá was more literate than that of Potrerillos. It estimated that only a quarter of the people here could not read in 1988—half the rate of illiteracy found in Potrerillos that same year. Using this information on sanitation, health and literacy, FHIS labeled Sabá as having a moderate level of poverty.

The buildings in this municipality resemble those found in Potrerillos. A sample of 352 out of a total of nearly 4000 households here were selected at random in September.

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33 Ibid.
2000 as part of this dissertation research. One adult member from each of these households was surveyed. They revealed that immediately before Mitch 69% of the homes in Sabá had concrete walls and floors while another one fifth had dirt floors and either adobe or mud walls. The houses in Sabá tended to be slightly larger than those found in Potrerillos, however. Surveys data revealed that only 15% of the households here (compared to 37% in Potrerillos) were single room structures before Mitch, 22% were two room structures, 25% were three room structures and 34% (compared to only 14% in Potrerillos) had four or more rooms.

This household level data was used to develop a poverty index for Sabá. The method for deriving this index was the same as the one used for Potrerillos. The survey data determined that the mean poverty index for Sabá was 8.27 with a standard deviation of 2.39. The degree of urbanization here was also significant, though not as great as that found in Potrerillos. Slightly over a third of all families here resided in rural areas in 2000. In other words, urbanization here was not as great as in Potrerillos. Although some rural households were relocated to urban centers after Mitch, a significant portion of them remained in their previous location.

The education level in Sabá was comparable to that found in Potrerillos. Twenty one percent of the adults surveyed reported that they had never received formal schooling, and 33% had been exposed only to some primary-level education. This suggests that approximately half of the adult population here had limited reading and

34 Please refer to Appendix A for more detailed information on how this sample size was determined and how surveys were gathered.

35 A more detailed description of how this poverty index was developed can be found in this chapter’s section on Potrerillos.
writing skills or was completely illiterate. However, 31% of those consulted had completed six grade, and the remaining 16% had received some post-primary instruction. Sabá, in other words, had a higher percentage of a well-educated citizenry when Mitch struck than Potrerillos.

Sabá has been an important site of banana production in Honduras since the early part of the twentieth century—a feature that further likens this municipality to Potrerillos. The first modern settlers to the area arrived here in the first decade of the twentieth century when Sabá was still part of the neighboring municipality of Sonaguera.36 In 1905 the Vaccaro Brothers Company (reorganized in 1924 into the Standard Fruit Company or SFCO) began constructing a railway that extended from the Port of La Ceiba to the Aguán River.37 The railway ran through most of what is today the northeastern tip of Sabá—the land area located just left or north of the Aguán River. In 1913 the Trujillo Railroad Company, a subsidiary of UFCO, began constructing another railroad that ran from the Port of Castilla through most of the Aguán Valley.38 The Trujillo Railroad dissected Sabá from the east and ended a couple of miles to the right or south of the Aguán River. Although the two railroads never met, they made Sabá a center of commercial and passenger exchange as well as an important site for banana cultivation.

Sabá began to decline in economic importance in the 1930’s when a plant fungus commonly known as sigatoka (*mycosphaerella musicola leach*) assaulted banana

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38 Delmer G. Ross, *Visionaries and Swindlers*, 89-90.
plantations along the Northern Coast of Honduras. The spread of the disease prompted the Trujillo Railroad Company to discontinue its operations in the area in 1935 and dismantle 125 km of its railway lines in the Aguán Valley. The land abandoned by the Trujillo Railroad Company reverted back to the national government. Although SFCO’s plantations were severely affected by sigatoka as well, the company chose to combat the spread of this disease by delving deeper into the Aguán Valley in search of new land. In order to facilitate this process, SFCO purchased 43 km of the Trujillo Railroad Company’s rail lines in 1938. Eventually, SFCO was able to acquire over 10,000 acres of land in the Aguán Valley during the 1930’s. The continual spread of sigatoka, however, eventually forced SFCO to discontinue its banana operations and railway services in 1942. This completely isolated Sabá, leaving it without roads or other means of transportation to the outside world.

From the 1940’s to the 1960’s Sabá became a scantily populated, backwater area. The withdrawal of the two banana companies encouraged some of the residents here to emigrate while others simply reverted to subsistence agriculture. Sonaguera, the municipality to which Sabá belonged until 1964, had a rural population of 2217 people in


40 Frank Ellis, *Las Transnacionales de Banano en Centroamerica*, 57.

41 Karnes, *Tropical Enterprise*, 267.

42 Filander Diaz Chavez, *Analisis Critico de las Condiciones Tecnicas de los Ferrocariles*, 16.

43 Karnes, *Tropical Enterprise*, 261-263.

44 Delmer G. Ross, *Visionaries and Swindlers*, 90.

1950. Therefore, Sabá’s population must have been lower than that during this period, making it comparable to Potrerillos’ population during the 1940’s. A total of 3291 hectares of land were under cultivation in Sonaguera in 1952, most of which was used to grow corn, beans and rice. Only 245 hectares was used for banana production.

SFCO seems to have reactivated its banana plantations in the area during the 1950’s or early 1960’s. The 1965 agricultural census, which gives us a more accurate depiction of land use patterns in the newly-formed municipality of Sabá, reports that out of the 1786 hectares of land under cultivation there that year, 1050 hectares were used for banana production. The remaining agricultural lands, were dedicated to basic grain production. By way of comparison, Potrerillos only had 836 hectares of the total 1345 hectares in production that year dedicated to banana. This fruit, in other words, had gained a similar degree of importance in both municipalities by 1965, accounting for 62% of total agricultural production in Potrerillos and 59% of agricultural production in Sabá.

The Honduran government began planning how to reactivate the Aguán Valley where Sabá is located during the 1960’s. It asked the Organization of American states for technical assistance on how it could increase and diversify agricultural production in the

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47 DGEC, *Censo General de Población 1950*

48 Ibid, 114.

49 The 1965 agricultural census reports that 2551 manzanas of land in Sabá were being cultivated with either permanent or annual crops. Banana was being cultivated on 1522 manzanas. One manzana equals 0.7 hectares. See DGEC, Secretaria de Agricultura y Ganadería, *Segundo Censo Agropecuario 1965-1966*, 67 and 162b.

50 Ibid, 80, 92, and 104.

51 Ibid, 68 and 162d.
country. In 1965 an independent consulting company concluded, “the Aguán Valley is one of the most promising agricultural lands in all of Honduras … provided that communications facilities can be restored and effective arrangements for production and marketing of crops can be made.”

The Honduran government began devising a development program for the Aguán Valley in response to this advice. The project sought to place 40,000 hectares of land into agricultural production, giving priority to citrus, palm oil and basic grain cultivation. USAID agreed to facilitate this process by funding the construction of a 60 km paved road from Sabá to the nearby cities of Tocoa and Corocito which would allow residents in the area to have access to the port of La Ceiba. The national government committed itself to building 475 km of secondary access roads to the new highway. In addition, it sought to promote a massive colonization program here. The Agrarian Reform Program was the principal means through which this colonization was to be achieved.


55 John Maxwell Hamilton et al., Honduras Rural Roads, 6-9.

The 1974 Agrarian Reform Program sought both to diminish the political tensions that had arisen in some areas of the country and populate the underdeveloped Aguán region. The national government induced the migration of hundreds of farmers from more combative, border areas of the country to this fertile and land-plentiful region by offering them free land. During the 1970’s INA distributed over 6000 hectares of land to new cooperatives in Sabá (See Table 6.2) while an additional 5000 hectares were used to create a reform group composed of residents from Sabá, Sonaguera and Olanchito. Thus, the agrarian reform program helped put into production more than three times the amount of land that had been under cultivation here during 1965.

The distribution of land and induced migrations of people into Sabá dramatically altered this municipality’s demography and agricultural production. By 1974 the population of Sabá had risen to 9596 people—five times what it had been twenty years earlier. More than two thirds of these individuals were living in rural areas. The municipality’s population continued to increase throughout the remainder of the decade such that by 1988 more than 15,000 people were living here. Previously uncultivated areas of Sabá were brought into agricultural production during the 1970’s, just as the government had hoped. By 1983 African palm trees occupied 6569 hectares of land in

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57 These land scarcity problems had taken one of its most violent expressions just a few years earlier during a brief war between Honduras and El Salvador. See William Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War*, (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1979).


60 Ibid
the Sabá-Tocoa area while grapefruit trees extended over another 1619 hectares.\textsuperscript{61} In other words, both crops had come to occupy more land in Sabá than what bananas ever had. Today, African palm trees and bananas continue to be the main crops produced in the area followed by citrus and basic grains.

**San Marcos**

San Marcos differs in significant ways from both Potrerillos and Sabá. It is not located in the Northern part of Honduras, as are the other two municipalities, but rather in the western Department of Ocotepeque. San Marcos covers 161 km\textsuperscript{2}, an area almost twice the size of Potrerillos yet less than half the size of Sabá. Much of this land extends over mountainous terrain that reaches a height of 1700 meters above sea level while another, smaller portion of this municipality forms part of the Valley of Sensenti.\textsuperscript{62} Although several rivers dissect San Marcos, none are as long or wide as the Humuya or Aguán Rivers. San Marcos lies relatively close to the Guatemalan and Salvadoran borders. Consequently, the residents from this area historically have maintained a significant level of contact with these two neighboring countries.

San Marcos has been more politically and economically isolated from the capital than either Potrerillos or Sabá. This is largely explained by the fact that no road connected the department of Ocotepeque to either San Pedro or Tegucigalpa until the 1960’s. Consequently, vehicle transportation between San Marcos and other major cities in the country was nearly impossible for most of its history. In 1945 TACA, a Central American airline, began offering air transportation service between San Marcos and both


San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa via a DC3 plane which seated up to thirty people. 63 Two decades later the first dirt road suitable for vehicles was opened in the area, connecting San Marcos to the neighboring municipality of La Labor. 64 However, vehicle transportation to San Pedro or Tegucigalpa remained unavailable for several more years. In 1965 the Western Highway was completed, running from San Pedro Sula to the western most tip of Ocotepeque where the road connects to both Guatemala and El Salvador. A few years later an all-vehicle, dirt road was constructed between San Marcos and the Western Highway, enabling local residents to travel to the capital by car for the first time. This extension road was paved in 1994. Although land transportation between San Marcos and the capital has improved significantly over the last few decades, the trip to the capital is still a lengthy one, lasting approximately seven hours by car.

The completion of the Western Highway helped stimulate agricultural production in San Marcos. Corn, beans and coffee traditionally have been the three major crops cultivated in this region of the country. Before the Western Highway’s completion, it was either unprofitable or only mildly profitable for these three crops to be cultivated for sale in the relatively large markets of San Pedro Sula and El Salvador. 65 As a result, these crops were grown primarily for subsistence purposes or sold in smaller, local markets. The completion of the Western Highway lowered transportation costs to El Salvador so dramatically that farmers in the area were encouraged to begin producing more coffee for sale there where market prices for the bean were higher than in


64 Ibid, 7.

65 Tommy Lee Martinso, “Selected Changes in Agricultural Production,” 71, 144, 147, 150, 153, 156 and 159.
Honduras. Between 1952 and 1965 the land area under coffee cultivation in San Marcos increased from 260 to 440 hectares. The harvesting and sale of this crop was so profitable that during the succeeding decades most of the farmers here began cultivating the bean. By 1993 over 70% of them were cultivating coffee on a total of 1890 hectares of land. Today, San Marcos is one of the leading coffee-producing regions in Honduras.

Basic grain production has been the second most important agricultural activity in San Marcos. However, there was only a mild increase in basic grain production here during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1952 there were 936 hectares of farm land here dedicated to corn, bean and rice production. These crops grew to cover 1152 hectares in 1965 and then declined slightly again in 1974 to cover only 1088 hectares. Although the Western Highway’s construction made the marketing of coffee in larger, regional markets more profitable after 1962, it did not change the economic rent of selling basic grains in these areas. Consequently, rice, beans and corn continued to be produced in San Marcos for local consumption. During the 1970’s INA distributed 589 hectares of land to 193 farmers in the municipality as part of the agrarian reform program.

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66 Ibid, 85 and 183.


69 See DGEC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Primer Censo Agropecuario 1952, 445-446.


71 Tommy Lee Martinso, “Selected Changes in Agricultural Production,” 71, 144, 147, 150, 153, 156 and 159.
and encouraged them to cultivate more basic grains. Yet, this does not seem to have significantly increased basic grain production in San Marcos. By 1993 the area of land dedicated to these crops had declined in favor of coffee production: less than 700 hectares of land were being used to grow corn and beans.\footnote{PRODERE, \textit{Informe de Avance 1993}.}

The gradual increase in coffee production in San Marcos after 1960 has helped make this municipality one of the most economically prosperous ones in the country. FHIS has labeled San Marcos as one of only three municipalities in Honduras with an acceptable level of poverty.\footnote{Ibid} (The other two are San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.) Only 14\% of the population here lacked access to basic health services in 1996. Most of the houses in San Marcos have indoor plumbing, over 92\% had potable water and 80\% had either a letrine or a bathroom in 1999.\footnote{Ministerio de Salud, Area 3, “Evaluación Semestral 1999 Area Ocotepeque,” (Ocotepeque: Ministerio de Salud, julio 1999).}

The houses in San Marcos tend to be larger and better built than those in the other municipalities under study here. Three hundred thirty households were selected at random out of a population of slightly over 2000.\footnote{Please refer to Appendix A for more detailed information on how this sample size was determined and how surveys were gathered.} One adult member from each of these was surveyed during April and May 2000 as part of this dissertation research and asked to describe the number of rooms in his/her house, the predominant floor and wall material there and whether the home was owned or rented. Only 7\% of the surveyed households (compared to 37\% in Potrerillos and 15\% in Sabá) were single room structures. Twenty percent had two rooms, 27\% had three rooms and 45\% (compared to
only 14% in Potrerillos and 34% in Sabá) had four or more rooms. The majority of these houses were made of adobe, the traditional building material in Western Honduras. The remaining third were built of concrete walls and floors. Although there were more houses in San Marcos with dirt floors then those in either Potrerillos or Sabá, there was a significantly greater percentage of houses here (32%) with tile floors (See Table 5-2).

The household level data gathered in San Marcos were used to develop a poverty index for this municipality which ranged in scale from 3 to 13. Survey results determined that San Marcos had a mean poverty index of 8.52 suggesting, as had the

Table 5-2 Household structures compared across the four municipal case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Index (3-13 scale)</th>
<th>Potrerillos</th>
<th>Sabá</th>
<th>San Marcos</th>
<th>Dolores Merendón</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with 5+ rooms</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with 4 rooms</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with 3 rooms</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with 2 rooms</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with 1 room</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Floor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with tiled floor</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with cement floor</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with wooden floor</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with dirt floor</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with concrete walls</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with adobe walls</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with wooden or cane walls</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with walls made of perishable goods</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76 A more detailed description of how this poverty index was developed can be found in this chapter’s section on Potrerillos.
national government’s data, that this municipality was generally more affluent than all of the other cases under study here. However, the surveys gathered in San Marcos also revealed that this municipality had a large wealth disparity, something which the national government’s data had not revealed. The standard deviation for San Marcos’ mean Poverty Index was 2.74—a standard deviation greater than that found in the other municipalities under consideration. A crosstab analysis comparing this Poverty Index to the rural/urban distribution of houses in San Marcos further elucidated that the wealthier households in the municipality were located in the urban heart of town while the poorer ones were found in rural areas. The chi-square of significance for this bivariate comparison is 65.587 with 9 degrees of freedom, suggesting that we can be over 99% confident that there is a relationship between the wealth and location of households in this municipality. It should be emphasized that unlike Potrerillos and Sabá over half of the households in San Marcos are located in rural areas and almost all of these depend on family farms for subsistence. Therefore, what poverty does exist here is primarily rural.

Although San Marcos enjoys greater material wealth than the other municipalities under study, it still suffers from significant nutritional and educational problems. FHIS reported that 41% of the population of San Marcos was malnourished in 1995.77 Four years later, the Ministry of Health observed that this condition had not changed.78 This means that the level of malnutrition here is comparable to that found in Potrerillos and slightly higher that in Sabá. San Marcos also had a 35% illiteracy rate in 1988, a

77 FHIS, FHIS-3 Indice de Pobreza.
percentage between that of Sabá’s (25%) and Potrerillos’ (58%) that same year.\textsuperscript{79} The surveys gathered in 2000 suggest that the level of schooling in San Marcos had not improved much during the preceding twelve years. Thirty one percent of the people consulted said they had never been exposed to formal schooling. Another 37% had received but not completed a primary school education, 12% had completed sixth grade and less than a fifth had studied beyond primary school. All of this information suggests that although San Marcos may possess greater physical capital than the other municipalities under study, it suffers from similar if not greater deficiencies in human capital than Potrerillos and Sabá.

**Dolores Merendón**

Dolores Merendón stands in sharp contrast to the other three municipalities that have just been described. It covers only 44.43 km\textsuperscript{2} and has under 3000 inhabitants, making it the smallest of the four selected municipalities in both size and population.\textsuperscript{80} Like San Marcos, Dolores Merendón is located in the Department of Ocotepeque. However, its land surface does not form part of a valley, as do the other three cases. Instead, Dolores Merendón is located in a mountainous region of Honduras that extends 1700 to 1900 meters above sea level. A few small rivers flow between the hills and mountains of this municipality, but none of these are as long or wide as those found in Sabá or Potrerillos. Due to its altitude, a dense fog often covers this region during the evening and early morning hours. In addition, the climate here is significantly colder.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid and FHIS, *FHIS-3 Indice de Pobreza.*

\textsuperscript{80} Ministerio de Salud, Area 3, “Evaluación Semestral 1999 Area Ocotepeque.”
than that found in the other municipalities chosen for study. The temperature here rarely rises above 80° F and can drop below 60° F in the evenings.

Transportation between Dolores Merendón and the outside world has always been difficult. But, unlike San Marcos, these transportation limits have not been overcome. A poorly managed, dirt road that is only traversable by a 4x4 vehicle connects Dolores Merendón to the Western Highway. Travel on this road lasts one to two hours, depending on where one is located within the municipality. Once on the Western Highway one must travel an additional forty five minutes by car in order to access the nearest cities of Ocotepeque and San Marcos.

Dolores Merendón is poorer than the other municipalities under study. One hundred seventy nine of the approximately 400 households here were surveyed in April 2000 as part of this dissertation research. These surveys revealed that the majority of houses in Dolores are small: 40% are single room and 36% two room structures. Eighty three percent of the homes surveyed had dirt floors and 79% were made of adobe. It was rare to find houses with concrete floors or walls. Indoor plumbing was also unusual. The Ministry of Health reports that only 35% of the houses here had letrines and 44% potable water in 1999. Moreover, only half the population had access to basic health services in 1996, and 75% of the children were malnourished in 1999.

Few of the adults in this municipality have graduated from elementary school, the only type of schooling available here. Sixty percent of those surveyed in 2000 had never

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81 Please refer to Appendix A for more detailed information on how this sample size was determined and how surveys were gathered.

82 Ministerio de Salud, Area 3, “Evaluación Semestral 1999 Area Ocotepeque.”

83 FHIS, FHIS-3 Indice de Pobreza and Ministerio de Salud, Area 3, “Evaluación Semestral 1999 Area Ocotepeque.”
received formal schooling, and 27% had not completed an elementary education. Only 13% of those consulted had graduated from six grade. Not surprisingly, the national government reports that Dolores Merendón has an 80% illiteracy rate.

Dolores Merendón is significantly poorer than the other three municipalities under study. The survey data collected here in 2000 was used to develop a poverty index for each household in this municipality that ranged in scale from a minimum score of 3 to a maximum of 13. The survey data revealed that Dolores had a mean poverty rate of 5.34, a score significantly lower than that found in our other three case studies. The standard deviation for this poverty index was 1.68. Therefore, 95% of the households here have a poverty index ranging from 3 to 7. This means that unlike San Marcos, there is no significant wealth disparity in Dolores. Most of the households here live in extreme poverty. Using a different set of poverty measures (i.e., data on health, education and sanitation conditions), FHIS has classified Dolores Merendón as having a high level of poverty and has ranked it as one of the poorest municipalities in Honduras.

Dolores Merendón is overwhelmingly rural. The survey data gathered in the area revealed that over 77% of the families here own farms. Two thirds of these were no larger than three manzanas (or 2.1 hectares) and a third were only a fraction of a
manzana. Those households who did not own a farm either rented land from others or worked as hired agricultural laborers.

Historically, subsistence agriculture has been the main type of economic activity in Dolores Merendón. The last three agricultural censuses report that corn and beans were the principal crops cultivated in this area of the country from the 1950’s to the 1970’s. Unlike the other three municipalities under study, INA did not distribute any land in Dolores Merendón as part of the agrarian reform program nor did it help farmers here diversify their crop production. Moreover, the Western Highway’s completion did not significantly alter the level or type of agricultural production in this municipality between 1952 and 1974, as occurred in San Marcos. This is largely because several kilometers of mountainous terrain separate Dolores Merendón from this highway, keeping transportation costs into and out of this area high. However, coffee cultivation did increase slightly here during the late 1970’s. Whereas only 16.5 hectares of farmland was cultivated with this crop in 1974, by the end of the decade coffee was being grown on 43 hectares. Today, most of the coffee grown in Dolores is exported to Guatemala via tertiary, dirt roads. Although this bean has brought some additional income to a handful of farmers here, most continue to cultivate mainly basic grains for subsistence purposes.

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85 Tommy Lee Martinso, “Selected Changes in Agricultural Production,” 71, 144, 147, 150, 153, 156 and 159.

Conclusion

As the preceding discussion reveals, the four municipalities that have been selected to test our four hypotheses share some similarities yet have significant differences. Potrerillos and Sabá are both located in fertile valleys in the northern part of the country while San Marcos and Dolores Merendón are in the mountainous regions of western Honduras. Potrerillos and Sabá have been banana producing regions that have been shaped by the intervention of multinational corporations (MNCs). By contrast, the two cases in Ocotepeque have had no contact with MNCs. Most farmers here are independent and have not been well integrated into the international world economy. Only during the later part of the twentieth century did San Marcos become an important coffee exporter and, thus dependent on the international coffee market. Poverty levels also differ among these areas. Sabá and Potrerillos both have a comparable level of poverty. However, San Marcos is slightly wealthier than they and Dolores Merendón significantly poorer than all. In addition, Dolores has had an organizational history that is much weaker than that of our other three cases, as the next chapter will explain. Ideally, it would have been best to select a municipality that was not as poor, isolated or unorganized as Dolores in order to compare it to the other selected cases. However, it is due to these very factors that residents here have received new, NGO assistance after Mitch despite not having suffered the effects of a natural disaster. Few other municipalities in Honduras have been so positioned. Since the social world can not be manipulated and controlled as can many natural science experiments, these four municipalities were selected because they provided the best means for testing our hypotheses. Given the acknowledged differences among the four areas that have been selected, it is still possible to test how residents here have responded to H₁ - H₄.
Although the research results reported here were not collected in a perfectly controlled, laboratory experiment, they do, at a minimum, provide a better understanding of how communities in Honduras have responded to foreign aid agencies and a natural disaster.
CHAPTER 6
COMPARING MUNICIPAL HISTORIES

Introduction

Historical context affects the socio-political development of groups of people and their responses to external stimuli. Initially, it was hoped that by studying four municipalities within a single nation-state the variable of history would be controlled. After all, the selected localities have experienced simultaneous shifts from authoritarian to democratic rule, are exposed to similar economic policies, and have been governed by the same national, political leaders and laws. Archival and on the ground research, however, revealed that despite these similarities, each of the four municipalities selected for study has experienced place-specific events that have shaped its people and social organizations.

The development of Potrerillos, for example, has been influenced by the intervention of large, capitalist enterprises and the relative weakness of government in local affairs. During the last half of the twentieth century residents have united into various labor unions and peasant organizations in order to defend their rights before larger, economic interests. Most of their protests and demands have revolved around bread and butter issues such as wage increases, fair working hours and labor safety. Although the national government has intervened at times to either implement labor laws or enforce existing ones, the organizations in Potrerillos rarely have protested or taken a stance on broader, political issues. Community councils known as patronatos have
represented residents before their municipal government for many decades. But they have been weak, entrenched in traditional, clientelist politics and subject to manipulation.

Sabá’s history also has been shaped by the presence of powerful, multinational corporations (MNCs). As in Potrerillos, labor unions have been active here during the later twentieth century. However, unlike the previously mentioned municipality, the national government began having an active presence in Sabá in the late 1960’s when the Aguán Valley became the target of an ambitious colonization program. The government induced the migration of people from other regions of the country, helped them organize into agrarian reform groups during the 1970’s, granted them vast tracts of land and offered them continual training and financial support. The Catholic Church also became active in the area during the 1970’s. It further supported the ideological development and social formation of reform groups in order to prevent them from becoming political pawns of the state. Initially, the government’s work in Sabá was an experiment in socialist, community groups. However, the revolutionary potential of these organizations was soon recognized by conservative groups who launched a series of political attacks on them and soon brought an end to this experiment. In spite of this repression or perhaps because of it, many residents of Sabá have looked beyond their immediate, economic interests and have focused on the larger, political issues that have affected them and the nation at large. In waves of periodic activity, residents from the area have become active in national-level politics. This local-national nexus has given Sabá a unique historical context.

San Marcos’ history has not been influenced by MNCs or large capitalist enterprises. Having no common enemy towards which they could direct their grievances,
residents have had little reason to organize around labor issues. In addition, there has been little experience with public protest or political demands as has been the case in other northern coast areas of Honduras. Historically, the national government has had only a marginal presence in San Marcos. Rather than wait for the government to initiate infrastructure projects here, residents traditionally have united in order to promote their own self-development. During the 1980’s and 1990’s the Honduran military increased its presence in this municipality due to the spill-over effects of armed conflicts in neighboring countries. But the military’s presence in San Marcos did not increase the national government’s support of local development, leaving residents to continue to fend for themselves. The United Nations and various NGOs began working here in the 1990’s in order to help manage a Salvadoran refugee camp and promote the socio-political development of the region. These external aid organizations strengthened pre-existing and propelled the formation of new community groups. These were encouraged to communicate and cooperate with their municipal government. Although the national government continues to have a weak presence in San Marcos, a good level of participatory local governance has been maintained which permits municipal representatives to make their demands or needs more readily heard by the central government.

Dolores Merendón stands in sharp contrast to these other three cases. The municipality is isolated from much of the outside world. Neither national nor international economic enterprises have a significant presence in the area. The municipality is almost completely neglected by the national government, and the municipal government is too weak, poor and disorganized to respond to citizen’s needs.
Consequently, residents here have disassociated themselves from the public sphere and focused on mainly private concerns. Unlike the residents in San Marcos, the inhabitants of Dolores have not organized for the purposes of their own self-advancement. Instead, people here have adopted an individualistic approach to life and cooperate with one another only rarely. The remaining sections of this chapter will explain in greater detail the history and past organizational experiences of these four communities in the hopes that this may enable us to better understand why the residents from these areas responded to both Hurricane Mitch and the intervention of foreign aid organizations in the manner that they did.

**Potrerillos**

Much of Potrerillos’ current organizational life may be explained with events that have transpired in the region since the mid-twentieth century. In 1954, shortly after the new, independent banana growers had established themselves here, a massive strike exploded among the workers of the United and Standard Fruit Companies. The strike was centered in the larger, banana-growing regions of La Lima, El Progreso, Puerto Cortes, Tela and La Ceiba. Employees there demanded better working conditions, a wage increase, double pay for work on Sunday, and other such labor benefits. Residents in Potrerillos heard about the strike through the radio. Most of them had never witnessed a strike nor fully understood its purpose. Nevertheless, many UFCO employees from the area decided to participate in this protest. They were joined in an act of solidarity by

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employees of the independent banana growers association. Women packed knapsacks full of food for these men who then walked one and a half to two days to either La Lima or El Progreso, the two striking cities closest to Potrerillos. Eventually, over 100,000 people from different parts of the country joined the strike, successfully freezing all banana production in Honduras. After sixty-nine days of protest, the workers finally obtained many of the concessions they had demanded.

The general strike of 1954 is a landmark in the history of organization in Potrerillos. Through this event many workers in the area participated in their first act of public protest. The success of the strike seems to have encouraged many to become organized and more active in demanding their labor rights. UFCO employees in Potrerillos became members of the newly formed Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company (SITRATERCO), a labor union formed just a few months after the strike. Some of the older residents of Potrerillos claim that the first generation of workers here were quite active in this organization and militant in their demands, as their participation in the 1954 strike reveals.

Labor unions appear to have been active in Potrerillos until the mid 1980’s. In addition to the SITRATERCO, two other labor unions had a strong presence in the area. One of these, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Maderera (SITRADIM), represented all those workers involved in the cutting and sawing of raw wood materials. The other labor union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de Mieles, Alcoles y Similares (SITIAMASH) represented people who worked in the sugar industry. Although no exact figures were available regarding the number of individuals that belonged to these

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2 All of the forthcoming information on organizational life in Potrerillos has been obtained through interviews with local community leaders.
organizations, the SITRATERCO seems by far to have encompassed the greatest number of workers from the area. Nevertheless, all three labor unions seem to have been quite active in organizing people and demanding workers’ rights. The labor movement began to weaken in the 1980’s when government repression against all organized groups in the country dramatically increased. By 1986 the SITRADIM had disintegrated. Five years later UFCO ceased its operations in Potrerillos, effectively marking the end of the SITRATERCO there. Although SITIAMASH continues to exist, the organization seems to be very weak and few people from Potrerillos belong to it.

The independent banana growers in the area have also been relatively well organized since the 1970’s. During that decade they formed a banana producers’ association (Asociación de Productores Bananeros del Norte or APROBANOR) to represent their interests before UFCO. However, the insignificance of their banana production relative to what was produced in other areas of the country as well as their lack of power vis a vis UFCO rendered their organization weak and inefficient. In the early 1990’s when UFCO ceased its operations in Potrerillos APROBANOR’s organization solidified as members applied for and received a 15 million lempira bank loan from the National Development Bank to buy and manage UFCO’s old processing and packaging facilities. Unfortunately, world banana prices dropped dramatically during this period and neither UFCO nor the SFCO were willing to buy bananas from these farmers. APROBANOR was not able to protect its members against larger market forces, and, eventually, they were forced to default on their loan.

Although this economic crisis weakened the independent banana grower’s organization, it did not eliminate it. A local sugar processing company, Azucarera Yojoa,
agreed to cancel APROBANOR’s bank loan in 1997 if the association’s members agreed to switch to sugar cane production and supply the company with a percentage of their harvest for the next five years. Many of the independent banana growers accepted the offer and began growing the new crop. Banana cultivation was not completely abandoned, however. Many felt that once world market prices stabilized, bananas which are harvested throughout the year would be more profitable than sugar which is harvested only twice a year. Consequently, approximately half of the farm land in Potrerillos continues to cultivate bananas while the rest is dedicated to sugar. The production and financial changes that occurred within APROBANOR during the 1990’s eventually weakened the integration and organization of this group. Only a loose association of sugar and banana growers remained in the area during 2000.

Fourteen agrarian reform groups have been established in Potrerillos since 1974 (See Table 6-1). One of these was a cooperative, ten were empresas campesinas asociativas (associative peasant enterprises or EAC) and three were asentamientos campesinos (peasant settlements). Each of these reform groups has a different organizational structure. Cooperatives and EACs are group-owned businesses where members equally own land and capital and supply the labor needed to put these into production. Members are often given a small plot of the group-owned land for family subsistence needs, but most of the group’s property is farmed collectively. EACs and cooperatives tend to be better organized than asentamientos. Members meet at least once a year through a general assembly where they elect a board of directors who administers

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Table 6-1  Land distributed in Potrerillos through agrarian reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Reform Groups</th>
<th>Land Area Granted</th>
<th>Suitable for Cultiv.</th>
<th>Year Establ</th>
<th>Type of Organ</th>
<th># of Original Members</th>
<th>Has. per Original Member</th>
<th>National Organiz Affiliat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Fraternidad</td>
<td>103 has</td>
<td>103 has</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td>ANACH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orqueta Entre Rios</td>
<td>91 has</td>
<td>91 has</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.35 has</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San José Independ.</td>
<td>200 has</td>
<td>200 has</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.52 has</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisas de Comayagua</td>
<td>68 has</td>
<td>68 has</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.53 has</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 de * Noviembre</td>
<td>14 has</td>
<td>14 has</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Ramón</td>
<td>104 has</td>
<td>104 has</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Asent</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.66 has</td>
<td>ANACH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Saní</td>
<td>70 has</td>
<td>70 has</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Asent.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1.89 has</td>
<td>ANACH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Ines</td>
<td>23 has</td>
<td>23 has</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Asent.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.55 has</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Invencibles</td>
<td>67 has</td>
<td>67 has</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>E.A.C.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.35 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella Vista**</td>
<td>85 has</td>
<td>60 has</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.49 has</td>
<td>CNTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueva * Esperanza</td>
<td>23 has</td>
<td>23 has</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.92 has</td>
<td>CNTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 de Mayo*</td>
<td>50 has</td>
<td>50 has</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.13 has</td>
<td>CNTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Miguel*</td>
<td>31 has</td>
<td>31 has</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.38 has</td>
<td>CNTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuevo *** Mundo</td>
<td>60 has</td>
<td>45 has</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.00 has</td>
<td>CNTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL: 14 Groups</td>
<td>989 has</td>
<td>949 has</td>
<td>var.</td>
<td>var.</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>2.45 has</td>
<td>var.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chart is derived from INA, Inventario de grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1995) and INA, Información básica de los grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1994).

* The information on these reform groups was not available in the above cited source and was obtained through interviews with beneficiaries.

** INA reported that this group was initiated as an asentamiento in 1993. However, group members explained that they were legally constituted as an EAC in 1987.

*** Although the community of Nuevo Mundo was an asentamiento in 1995, as reported by INA, it became an Empresa Asociativa Campesina the following year.
the group’s profits, distributing part among the members and both reserving and
reinvesting the remainder. They Cooperatives and EACs differ mainly in that the former
allows members to employ hired labor while the later tries to discourage such practices
by requiring that membership rights be extended to those who have worked for the
enterprise for more than a year. EACs, in other words, discourage capitalist modes of
production while cooperatives allow it. Asentamientos campesinos differ from these two
groups in that they do not have a formal structure nor a formal set of rules to guide their
operations. In addition, the farmers that form asentamientos tend to have larger
individual-family plots and smaller collective plots than do members of cooperatives or
EACs. Asentamientos often are composed of people with family ties. The informal
structure and composition of these settlements tends to prevent members from developing
a strong collective conscious.

The EACs that have been established in Potrerillos, particularly in the 1990’s, are
extremely well organized. Three EACs (San Miguel, Nueva Esperanza and 24 de Mayo)
were relocated to Potrerillos in 1997 from Guaymas in the department of Yoro, one of the

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5 Bradford L. Barham and Malcolm Childress, “Membership Desertion as an Adjustment Process on


8 PROCARA, *PROCCARA 46 Meses*, III 50A.

9 Ibid, III 60-61.
oldest and best organized peasant sectors in Honduras. The members of these EACs are second generation reform group members. As they explain it, “Nacimos en la organización” (We were born into organization). They know no other way of life than that provided through cooperative work. Not surprisingly, these members meet on an almost weekly basis to coordinate their work activities. The members of the Buena Vista and Nuevo Mundo EACs are also extremely well organized. They came to Potrerillos in the 1980’s from Colomoncagua, Intibucá where one of the country’s three Salvadoran refugee camps had been established. These individuals fled their native town after being accused of supporting Salvadoran guerilla groups and receiving military threats. They settled in an isolated, sparsely populated and mountainous region of Potrerillos. Their long migration here and isolation from others contributed to their current social cohesion. They, like the three groups from Guaymas, work jointly on their farms on a daily basis and meet formally as often as once a week. All five of these EACs are part of the CNTC, one of the most combative and socially-minded peasant federations in the country.

The four EACs and one cooperative that were established in Potrerillos during the 1970’s and early 1980’s are not as well organized as the groups just discussed. None of these EACs were affiliated with national peasant federations—something which has tended to strengthen the organization and political activism of reform groups. Although they had a well-structured organizational system, they, like other EACs in the country,

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allowed INA to intervene in its assemblies and management.\textsuperscript{12} As a result, these groups developed a paternalistic relationship with this state institution. Something similar occurred to the cooperative, La Fraternidad, which suffered significant membership desertion because the original group was given an insufficient amount of land to sustain the needs of all. This made agricultural production unprofitable and led to member defection.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, all of these EACs and coops remain moderately well organized.

\textit{Asentamientos campesinos} have been significantly weaker than the previously mentioned reform groups. The five \textit{asentamientos} that existed in Potrerillos in 2000 were established after 1982 when the national government was trying to weaken organized groups in the country, often through oppression. During this period INA wanted to continue complying with the Agrarian Reform Law yet avoid organizing or mobilizing peasant beneficiaries.\textsuperscript{14} Consequently, the agrarian reform program of the 1980’s ceased to be one that promoted collective land use and, instead, advocated the principles of private property by titling land to small farmer beneficiaries.\textsuperscript{15} Today, these groups function much like typical family-owned, subsistence farms. Each member of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Guadalup Carney, \textit{To be a Revolutionary: An Autobiography} (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985): 398.
\item \textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of how small land disbursements have contributed to reform group desertion in Honduras see Barham and Childress, “Membership Desertion as an Adjustment Process,” 587-613.
\item \textsuperscript{15} USAID, \textit{Honduras Project Paper: Small Farmer Titling} (Washington: USAID, 1982).
\end{itemize}
asentamiento cultivates a parcel of land for his family’s consumption while another, smaller plot of land is used collectively for grazing animals.

Aside from the labor unions and farmers groups just mentioned, community organizations in Potrerillos appear to have been weak before Mitch. The first patronatos or community councils in the municipality were formed in the 1950’s. However, these have tended to be inactive, periodically disappearing altogether. As one community member expressed, “Los patronatos dejan mucho que desear en el aspecto social.”

Many patronato leaders acknowledge their group’s weakness but attribute this to the lack of interest or support expressed by local residents. As a result of this apathy, the existence and strength of these groups has often depended on whether municipal authorities have promoted them. The municipal government, for example, began encouraging every community in Potrerillos to form its own patronato in 1994, threatening that if they did not do so they would be unable to receive assistance from the local government. In response to this inducement, patronatos proliferated in the area. However, many of these local councils have been unable to acquire an identity independent of the municipal government’s. Some residents claim that the heads of the patronatos are selected by the mayor—a practice which seems to have occurred with some local councils. Consequently, many residents view these groups as instruments of the party in political power.

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16 Interview with José Octavio López, resident of Potrerillos, March 28, 2000.

17 Interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, February 1, 2000.

18 This information is based on interviews with various presidents of patronatos in January and February 2000.
Comités de Emergencia (Emergency Committees), another local-level organization, have existed in Potrerillos for nearly three decades. The first one of these was formed by the Comisión Permanente de Emergencia (COPEN), the Honduran national emergency management agency that preceded COPECO, in 1974 in response to Hurricane Fifí. However, this emergency committee disappeared shortly after the hurricane had passed. Since then, other Comités de Emergencia have been formed, but they have functioned only for brief periods. They generally arise during floods or other crisis periods and disintegrate shortly thereafter. Throughout most of the year these organizations remain inactive. During the few months before Mitch, COPECO (formerly COPEN) and the local Red Cross helped reanimate new Comités de Emergencia in Potrerillos and draft Emergency Plans. Between June and September 1998 they concentrated their efforts on four communities located between the Humuya and Blanco Rivers, the areas in Potrerillos at greatest risk of floods. The Red Cross sponsored two-day workshops on how to prepare for emergency responses. Although they were unsuccessful in organizing a Comité de Emergencia in one of these communities, they did succeed in establishing a fairly well trained, mostly female, emergency response team in the other three areas.¹⁹

Church groups also have been weak in Potrerillos. Although many residents attend religious services on Sundays, few church organizations exist here. Protestants attend church more regularly than Catholics; however, they limit their activities to praying and reading the Bible, and are discouraged from organizing or becoming involved in larger social issues. The Catholic Church, which has historically been more socially active in Honduras, has had a weak presence in Potrerillos. Until early 1998 no Catholic clergy

¹⁹ Interview with Román Garcia, Representative of Poterrillo’s Red Cross, March 29, 2000.
resided in the area. Priests traveled here from the neighboring municipality of Villanueva only to give weekly mass. In order to counteract a shortage of priests in the country, the Catholic Church began encouraging the formation of *Delegados de la Palabra* (Delegates of the Word) during the 1960’s. But, these lay activists were not trained in Potrerillos until 1989. Even then, only a handful of community members became *Delegados de la Palabra*. During the 1990’s the Catholic Church began establishing *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs or Christian Base Communities) throughout the country; but, the absence of permanent priests and only scant presence of *Delegados* in Potrerillos hampered this process here. Although a few CEBs were formed, they quickly disintegrated due to a lack of both interest and commitment on the part of its members. No CEBs existed in this municipality during the late 1990’s.

The organizational history of Potrerillos has been quite diverse. Labor unions, farmers associations and agrarian reform groups became fairly well organized and active here after the 1950’s. Economic factors seem to have debilitated the labor unions and one farmer association during the 1990’s. Only the EACs and recently formed *Comités de Emergencia* remained well organized when Mitch afflicted the area in 1998. All other groups were frail or non-existent. This, at least, is the perspective of community members.

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The 369 adults that were surveyed in Potrerillos as part of this study were asked to describe the state of their community’s organization immediately before Mitch. Only 10% of those surveyed said they thought community groups were active in Potrerillos before Mitch while another 12% thought these had been moderate in strength. A third of those surveyed said that there had been no organization in their community before the disaster while another third said that what organization did exist had been weak. Later sections of this dissertation will explore whether the experience of disaster had any socio-political impact on the residents of this municipality.

**Sabá**

Many of the organizations that have been present in Potrerillos have also arisen in Sabá. Labor unions, for example, have had a significant presence in this municipality since the mid-1950’s and several cooperatives were established here as part of the agrarian reform program. Despite these similarities, the various groups that have been established in Sabá have developed under a different set of circumstances than those in Potrerillos. The following section will try to outline the particular context and evolution of organizations here in order to explain later how this history bears upon the current socio-political characteristics of the region.

The first community groups to arise in Sabá were organized so as to fight for the municipal independence of the region. During the 1950’s three separate commissions were established who sought Sabá’s political-territorial separation from Sonaguera. The first two of these petitioned for independence via letters to the national government from

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whom they received no response. A third group formed in 1959 was more proactive. It sent a commission of four residents to Tegucigalpa where they initiated the legal procedures required to convert Sabá into a new municipality. The government of Sonaguera, however, successfully managed to hinder this process and keep Sabá under its jurisdiction. A fourth commission was established in 1964. This one was larger than its predecessors and encompassed all the school teachers in the area as well as four prominent community members. The 1964 commission was more belligerent than the ones that had preceded it. In addition to writing letters and resubmitting the paperwork required to make Sabá a municipality, all of this group’s members met with regional and national level government officials requesting help in obtaining their political objective. Their request was granted on May 1964 when Sabá was declared a municipality via Decree #918.

The 1950’s signaled a rise in yet another type of organization in Sabá: labor unions. On May 7, 1954 employees of the Standard Fruit Company joined the general strike which had originated a few days earlier among UFCO workers in demand of higher wages and just treatment from supervisors. At the time, the municipality of Sonaguera to which Sabá was still a part had over 1100 salaried employees, most of whom worked for SFCO. Although the nation-wide strike lasted a total of 69 days, SFCO workers reached an agreement with their employer after only a two week labor stoppage. A year

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after the strike’s end, all of SFCO’s employees united to form the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Standard Fruit Company* (SITRASFRUCO). SITRASFRUCO became the second largest and one of the most combative labor organizations in the country. In 1964 it joined with the employees of the SFCO’s port and railroad facilities to form the *Sindicato Unificado de Trabajadores de la Standard Fruit Company* (SUTRASFCO), an organization that represented over 3600 employees. Despite periods of labor repression during the early 1960’s, both the SITRASFRUCO and later the SUTRASFCO remained active in the region.

The SUTRASFCO ceased functioning in Sabá in 1974. Hurricane Fifi ravished the northern coast of Honduras in that year, destroying over 20,000 hectares of banana plantations that SFCO owned in both Sabá and neighboring municipalities. The company found it economically unfeasible to restore its plantations. In addition, SFCO wanted to disassociate itself from SUTRASFCO which had become increasingly more militant and leftist in its activities. Consequently, the company responded to this disaster by dismissing 2000 workers and abandoning its plantations in the area. Although former SUTRASFCO members were granted severance pay, they did not accept their job

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loss passively. They invaded the property that had been abandoned by SFCO and demanded that the government grant this to them as part of an agrarian reform program.\textsuperscript{30}

The Empresa Asociativa Campesina de Isletas (EACI) was established in May 1975 in response to these demands with 325 former SFCO employees, many of whom were residents of Sabá. The group’s membership soon increased to over 1500 associates.\textsuperscript{31} INA granted them over 32,000 hectares of formerly SFCO-land which spread across the municipalities of Sabá, Sonaguera and Olanchito.\textsuperscript{32} The group’s members began replanting bananas on this property soon after SFCO’s retreat from the area. They did this without pay or benefits, relying only on the food they were receiving from the United Nations World Food Programme.\textsuperscript{33}

EACI was given strong support from INA and a new Food and Agriculture Organization-funded program within INA called PROCCARA (\textit{Programa de Capacitación Capesina para la Reforma Agraria}). PROCCARA was headed by a Brazilian, Clodomir Santos de Morais, with strong socialist inclinations. He together with the rest of the progressively-minded members of INA and PROCCARA wanted to avoid many of the problems encountered by the cooperatives that had been established in Honduras after the first agrarian reform law of 1962. They considered that past cooperatives had been mere capitalist enterprises run by an administrative council who


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 60 and Martiniano Lombrana, \textit{Historia del movimiento campesino de Honduras}, 26-29.


made all of the decisions and gave little participation to its members. The INA-
PROCCARA team advocated the establishment of *empresas asociativas campesinas*—a
model that had recently been developed in Peru. EACs, they believed, were examples of
true self-government because they allowed members to participate in the decision-making
process. Isletas was selected to be the first and by far the largest EAC experiment in
Honduras. Consequently, from its inception, EACI was heavily counseled by both INA
and PROCCARA technicians.\(^3\)

EACI soon became a model of peasant organization. When it was formally
constituted in 1975 EACI did not have a formal organizational structure in place. A
provisional administrative council was established to temporarily direct the group’s
operations and help develop a more permanent structure for the enterprise. The council
was composed of six former SUTRASFCO leaders, one delegate from each of the eight
banana plantations that SFCO had abandoned, four unit leaders (in charge of overseeing
the areas of transportation, mechanization, construction and vigilance) and two INA
officials.\(^3\) Some INA officials and Catholic Church advisors suggested that EACI be
divided into eight smaller peasant groups so as to better ensure the participation of all its
members.\(^3\) However, this idea was rejected by the group’s members in favor of having
one larger enterprise with over 1200 associates. Slightly over a year after this group’s
formation, a formal statute was developed for EACI with strong technical assistance from

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\(^3\) Carney, *To be a Revolutionary*, 322-324, 335 and Lombrana, *Historia del movimiento campesino*, 25.

\(^3\) PROCARA, *PROCARA 46 Meses*, III-109-110.

\(^3\) Interview with Rigoberto Sandoval Corea, Director of INA (1967-71 and 1976-77), printed in Hugo Noe
The new statute abided by the new Statute of Empresas Asociativas Campesinas, which stated the all EACs should have a board of directors exclusively composed of a president, vice president, secretary general and treasurer. Although this formal structure gave a more limited participation to EACs than the provisional administrative council had, EACI members established a consultative body apart from the board of directors that would ensure the participation of a larger group of people in the decision-making process than that required by law.38

In addition to being a model of organization, EACI was also economically successful. With the financial and technical support it received from INA, the National Development Bank and the Honduran Banana Corporation, EACI quickly replanted the plantations abandoned by SFCO and dramatically expanded its level of production between 1975 and 1977.39 Within a few short years it almost equaled SFCO’s pre-hurricane banana production.40

Several other community groups also were established in Sabá as part of the agrarian reform program. Between 1974 and 1977 thirteen cooperatives with 386 initial members were founded in this municipality (See Table 6-2). The majority of these coops were composed of members that had migrated here from border regions where peasants

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37 The full statute is reprinted in PROCARA, PROCARA 46 Meses, anexo #15.

38 Mario Posas, La autogestión en el agro Hondureno, 76-77.

39 André-Marcel d’Ans, Honduras: emergencia difícil de una nación, de un estado, 249 and Martiniano Lombrana, Historia del movimiento campesino de Honduras, 26.

40 Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH), Honduras: historias no contadas, (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH, 1985): 141.
Table 6-2 Land distributed in Sabá through the agrarian reform program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Land Area</th>
<th>Suitable for Cultivat.</th>
<th>Year Establ.</th>
<th>Type of Organ</th>
<th># of Original Members</th>
<th>Hectares per Member</th>
<th>National Organ. Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabá Ltda.</td>
<td>417 has</td>
<td>407 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.86 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luzón Palmeras</td>
<td>511 has</td>
<td>511 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17.03 has</td>
<td>ANACH + FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unión San Francisco</td>
<td>384 has</td>
<td>384 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.36 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagrado Corazón</td>
<td>492 has</td>
<td>450 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.06 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orica</td>
<td>393 has</td>
<td>393 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.65 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueva Jerusalem</td>
<td>498 has</td>
<td>498 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.5 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidad Sureña</td>
<td>467 has</td>
<td>467 has</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.15 has</td>
<td>ANACH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Palos de Agua</td>
<td>395 has</td>
<td>395 has</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.8 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Esfuerzo Hondureno</td>
<td>639 has</td>
<td>639 has</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17.75 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntades Unidas</td>
<td>448 has</td>
<td>448 has</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11.79 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cholomena</td>
<td>584 has</td>
<td>557 has</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.63 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pires</td>
<td>703 has</td>
<td>498 has</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12.55 has</td>
<td>ANACH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Mercedez</td>
<td>453 has</td>
<td>421 has</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Coop.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16.18 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 13 groups 6384 has 6068 var. All Coops 386 has variable

The information on this chart is derived from INA, Inventario de grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1995) and INA, Información básica de los grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1994).

had become increasingly more belligerent in their demand for land.41 Not surprisingly, many of these cooperatives obtained land concessions because they had first pressured INA for them. EACs was instituted in all of the ANACH and FECORAH cooperatives that were working in the Aguán Valley.42

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42 Padre Guadalup Carney, To be a Revolutionary, 323-324.
Present and former cooperative members in Sabá explain that their organizations had a high degree of social cohesion during the 1970’s. Members meet frequently, made decisions jointly and worked well in groups. In fact, the three peasant associations with which cooperatives in Sabá were affiliated (the Federación de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria Hondurena [FECORAH], the Unión Nacional Campesina [UNC] and the Asociación Nacional de Campesinos Hondurenos [ANACH]) were the reform groups who most communally managed their land and machinery. The four cooperatives in Sabá that belonged to the UNC and ANACH also had a leftist political orientation which emphasized the need to work communally not merely for the sake of profit, but in order to achieve workers’ liberation from exploitation. Although the cooperatives and EACs generally have different organizational structures, there was little difference between these two types of organizations in Sabá. The system of work committees typical of

The thirteen cooperatives in Sabá were not all economically profitable during their first few years of operation as was the case with EACI. Approximately half of these groups began cultivating citrus while the rest planted African palm trees upon their formation. Citrus-growing cooperatives had to wait two years for their trees to bear fruit. During that time, coop members and their families subsisted on basic grain production. Unfortunately, the harvest of citrus proved very unprofitable for these groups and led to the near bankruptcy of many. By the early 1980’s those cooperatives who had begun cultivating citrus had switched, at least in part, to palm oil production. African palm tree

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43 This is based on personal interviews held in Sabá on September 2000 with several current and former cooperative members. See also Padre Guadalup Carney, To be a Revolutionary, 370.

44 PROCARA, PROCARA 46 Meses, III-16.

growers suffered similar hardships. They had to wait five years after planting for their trees to bear oil-producing nuts. Yet even when these groups began harvesting the long-awaited palm nut, they did not reap significant profits because there were few buyers willing to purchase their raw product.

Despite early financial difficulties, these reform groups remained committed to working together. This commitment is evidenced not only in the persistence of the thirteen cooperatives, but also in the creation of a new, second tier organization in the region. Fifty four palm cooperatives in the Aguán Valley, including all those in Sabá, united to form an industrial processing company, the Cooperativa Agroindustrial de Palma (COAPALMA), in 1980. Unlike like most other cooperatives in the region, COAPALMA was established due to member initiatives and not INA promotion. The Honduran state tried to control COAPALMA from its inception by legally stipulating that this cooperative be jointly managed by its members and the state. However, this condition was eliminated after a strike by COAPALMA’s members forced the government to allow them to manage their company independently. The establishment of COAPALMA not only increased inter-reform group cooperation in Sabá but also made palm producers in the region more profitable. By extracting oil from palm nuts this company was able to obtain a better market price for the raw material its members produced. In addition, COAPALMA helped its members acquire loans and purchase fertilizers with greater ease than they would have individually.

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46 Interview with Cenen Martínez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000.


48 Ibid, 64.
Various factors may account for the organizational strength of the cooperatives in Sabá. First, reform groups in the Aguán Valley received significantly more land—an average of 16.5 hectares of land per person—than did most other reform beneficiaries in the country.\footnote{See INA, \textit{Resumen Básico de los Grupos Campesinos Beneficiarios de la Reforma Agraria}, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1985).} Secondly, all reform groups in this municipality had access to good transportation due to the secondary road program initiated by the Honduran government in the late 1960’s. They also received strong technical and financial support from the government—seemingly more support than what was offered to reform groups in Potrerillos and San Marcos. FECORAH and EAC affiliates, in particular, received preferential assistance from INA.\footnote{Padre Guadalup Carney, \textit{To be a Revolutionary}, 323.}

Another critical factor that may account for the strength and cohesion of reform groups in Sabá was their high degree of group consciousness. Since most coop members were transplanted here from other regions of the country and selectively grouped together into coops by INA, this collective consciousness had to be instilled in them by different support organizations. During the 1970’s and 1980’s INA, the \textit{Instituto de Formación Profesional} (INFOP) and the \textit{Instituto Nacional de Capacitación y Desarrollo Humano} (INCADEH) continually offered training courses to reform beneficiaries in the area. The topic of organizational strengthening was a major focus of these courses.\footnote{See PROCARA, \textit{PROCARA 46 Meses}, section IV.} The Catholic Church also became active in training cooperatives in the area. Jesuit priests took over the four parishes in department of Colón where Sabá is located in 1975.\footnote{Ricardo Falla, \textit{Jesuitas en Honduras: 50 Anos}, (El Progreso: AMDG, 1996): 23 and Padre Guadalup Carney, \textit{To be a Revolutionary} 324 (see also chapters 17-19).} They worked...
closely with reform groups there in order to strengthen their organization and ensure that they did not become pawns of the state. In order to facilitate this process the Church constructed a training center, the Centro de Capacitación Salamá in the nearby town of Tocoa where cooperative groups were regularly assembled and offered retreats and courses with a clearly leftist, socio-political orientation. In addition, Jesuits offered literacy programs, a critical analysis of national, socio-political issues and discussions on the function and importance of organized groups through a radio station they managed, Radio Progreso. Such radio programs had had a radicalizing effect on the peasantry elsewhere in the country and came to have a similar impact on cooperatives here.

The organizational fervor of both agrarian reform beneficiaries and their supporters soon made them subjects of political concern. Conservative, political groups increasingly described the Aguán Valley as a leftist stronghold and threat to Honduran political stability. The Centro de Capacitación Salamá was viewed as a center for guerrilla indoctrination and the Jesuits who worked in the area were branded as communists. Various cooperative leaders were also given the same label. It was only a matter of time before right-wing political factions would seek to quell the popular movement that had been developing in the area.

The first political assault on organized groups in Sabá came in 1977 when a military batallion from La Ceiba took over EACI’s operations, jailed all its board of

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53 Padre Guadalup Carney, *To be a Revolutionary*, 18 - 20 and 366-368.


directors and replaced them with new, hand-picked leaders. EACI had been producing bananas and selling these to SFCO since 1975. At first it sold its produce directly to this multinational and later through a state-managed intermediary called COHBANA. Despite the official independence of EACI, SFCO controlled its operations by setting the company’s quality control standards and product market price. EACI’s first board of directors began criticizing both SFCO and COHBANA and threatened to sell its products to another banana company at a more favorable price. SFCO purportedly retaliated by bribing Col. Gustavo Alvarez Martínez of the fourth military battalion to take over EACI and depose its leaders. It is unclear whether SFCO’s payoff was the only impetus for the military take-over of EACI. Most likely, EACI’s criticism of SFCO was the mere impetus for the military’s intervention in the its affairs, for the group’s organizational strength had been a subject of concern among conservatives in Honduras since its foundation.

The military’s involvement in EACI prompted a critical reaction from various groups and individuals in the country. The Catholic Church protested what transpired in EACI through Radio Progreso only to have its program forcefully shut down shortly thereafter. Rigoberto Sandoval Corea, then director of INA, also condemned the military’s intervention. However, neither he nor other INA officials could do much


58 André-Marcel d’Ans, *Honduras: emergencia difícil de una nación, de un estado*, 249-250.


about this event. INA’s most progressive thinkers had been dismissed from the
institution just two years earlier when a more conservative military faction had taken over
the government.\textsuperscript{61} Many of INA’s remaining workers had become corrupted\textsuperscript{62} and were
uncommitted to the original ideals that drove the experiment in socialist organizations in
the Aguán Valley.

EACI members were even less able to respond to the military’s intervention in its
affairs. The newly-imposed board of directors expelled 200 of EACI’s most militant
members and initiated a campaign of terror against the remaining associates in order to
silence their protests.\textsuperscript{63} A permanent military camp was established in Isletas to further
intimidate members into quiescence.\textsuperscript{64} Ironically, Raphael Sánchez, one of the board of
directors that had been imposed by the military, began revealing proof in 1979 that
COHBANA was cheating and causing the economic demise of EACI. The military
responded by jailing and replacing him with a new, corrupt group of leaders. Sánchez
continued to denounce EACI’s corruption until 1980 when he was gunned down just days
after his release from prison. His assassins were purportedly hired by the newly-imposed
board of directors and paid with funds from this peasant enterprise.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{61} Mario Posas, \textit{La autogestión en el agro Hondureno}, 69.

\textsuperscript{62} Interview with Rigoberto Sandoval Corea, Director of INA (1967-71 and 1976-77), printed in Hugo Noe

\textsuperscript{63} Mario Posas, \textit{El movimiento campesino Hondureno}, 42-47; Hugo Noé Pino, “La Empresa Asociativa de

\textsuperscript{64} Interview with Cenen Martínez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000 and CEDOH,
\textit{Honduras: historias no contadas}, 145.

\textsuperscript{65} Mario Posas, \textit{La autogestión en el agro Hondureno}, 99-104; Mario Posas, “In the Jaws of the Standard
EACI members did not passively accept these and other similar events. They held strikes, protests and tried to eliminate the corrupt leaders in their organization. But, these actions were in vain. Every time EACI members tried to assert their will, the military responded with repression and secured the positions of corrupt leaders. In return, the illegitimate EACI leaders thanked their military body guards with payoffs from their company’s coffers. One group of EACI members chose to simply separate themselves from this organization and establish a separate cooperative, Unión y Lucha, in order to escape the problems that plagued this group.

The cooperatives in Sabá suffered similar assaults as did EACI. Conservative groups resented COAPALMA’s organizational strength and early economic success. They had been unable to corrupt the company’s first board of directors despite several attempts. Consequently, conservative groups changed tactics and began using ideological warfare to weaken COAPALMA. They convinced members of this cooperative that their directive was composed of communist who threatened their existence. COAPALMA members increasingly became convinced of the need for a new group of leaders. In 1982 they deposed their first board of directors and replaced them with a new, more corruptable group of leaders. The state’s manipulation of COAPALMA was often more direct: it periodically threatened to retreat its support of the organization if certain

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66 Mario Posas, *La autogestión en el agro Hondureno*.


68 Ibid.

69 Ibid, 125.
individuals were not selected as leaders.\textsuperscript{70} When members refused to comply or sought to select leaders irrespective of external wills, the military would intervene in much the same way it had in EACI.\textsuperscript{71} The incessant intervention of the state and other conservative forces in COAPALMA’s affairs eventually led to the organization’s corruption and indebtedness. Despite producing over 30,000 metric tons of palm oil, more than any other domestic, agro-industrial plant of its kind,\textsuperscript{72} COAPALMA began to lose money during the 1980’s and frequently delayed distributing its profits among its associates.\textsuperscript{73} Although the group’s corruption soon became evident, members were scared into silence. Those who did criticize the company’s leaders or their corruption were threatened, sequestered and beaten. Thus, through their control of COAPALMA, conservative political groups were able to weaken people’s trust in their leaders and in cooperative endeavors.\textsuperscript{74}

The Catholic Church responded to all of these events by criticizing the military-backed corruption of organized groups and denouncing human rights abuses in the region. A Justice and Peace Commission was established in the parishes of Sonaguera (to which Sabá still belonged) and Tocoa in 1979. The ideological basis of these commissions was the Church’s teachings on social justice. Soon afterward, popular

\textsuperscript{70} Hugo Noe Pino, “La agroindustria de la palma africana en el proyecto bajo Aguán,” 70 and interview with Cenen Martínez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000.


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 149.

\textsuperscript{73} Interview with former members of the Cooperative Unión San Francisco, September 20, 2000 and interview with Luis Hernández, president of Cooperativa Sabá, September 13, 2000..

\textsuperscript{74} Interview with Cenen Martínez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000 and Hugo Noe Pino, “La agroindustria de la palma africana en el proyecto bajo Aguán,” 70.
organizations from Colón were invited to unite with the Justice and Peace Commission in forming a regional Committee for the Defense of Human Rights. Thirty popular organizations responded to this call, but fear of repression soon forced them to withdraw from this organization. The Church, however, continued unabated in denouncing abuses in the area. A diocesan, legal assistance program called *Socorro Jurídico* (judicial help) was also initiated in the 1980’s. *Socorro Jurídico* offered free legal assistance to people within the Aguán Valley who were victims of human rights abuses. At the height of its operations, *Socorro Jurídico* had seven permanent employees and approximately 600 volunteers working in the diocese. In 1981, shortly after the Church had become involved with human rights issues, the national-level *Comité de Derechos Humanos* (CODEH or Committee on Human Rights) was founded. CODEH set-up a regional office in Sabá and began working closely with *Socorro Jurídico* to present human rights cases before the Honduran courts.

In spite of this activity or perhaps in response to it, the Catholic Church in the Aguán Valley began suffering persecution in the 1980’s. Aside from defending human rights and denouncing the economic and political oppression of the poor, most lay and clergy leaders had become activists in the newly formed Democratic Christian Party. Some, had even joined socialist or communist groups. Father Guadalupe Carney, one of

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75 Padre Guadalup Carney, *To be a Revolutionary*, 395-398.


77 For a more general account of the persecution suffered by the Catholic Church at this time see José María Tojeira, “Historial de la persecución a la iglesia hondureña,” *Honduras, historias no contadas*, (Tegucigalpa: CEDOH, 1985): 159-169.

78 Padre Guadalup Carney, *To be a Revolutionary*, 346.
the most outspoken Jesuits in the area, was expelled from Honduras in 1979 and was killed four years later when trying to re-enter the country from Nicaragua as the spiritual advisor of an armed guerrilla group.\textsuperscript{79} Father Juan Donald and Sister Marina Eseverri, two clergy members that had been assigned to work in Sabá, were also deported from Honduras in 1985.\textsuperscript{80} In addition, countless lay activists from the region were forced to flee the country or were captured and beaten during the 1980’s.

The government’s continual repression eventually succeeded in pacifying most organized groups in Sabá. Former members of EACI explain that the corruption of this peasant enterprise actually weakened the organization that had once existed among its members. Although everyone knew of the money being stolen from the enterprise, few denounced it for fear of death.\textsuperscript{81} The few people who did speak out against this injustice were either sequestered and tortured or forced to flee.\textsuperscript{82} Cooperatives encountered a similar problem. The fear of organization reached such a degree that the Catholic Church was unable to encourage the formation of Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs or Christian Base Communities) in EACI\textsuperscript{83} or other cooperative settlements. By the 1990’s the agrarian reform groups in the area which had once been models of organization and economic cooperation had been weakened significantly. Group members had ceased

\textsuperscript{79} Padre Guadalup Carney, \textit{To be a Revolutionary}, chapter 22 and epilogue.


\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Domitila Hernández, former member of EACI, September 10, 2000.

\textsuperscript{82} Interview with Luis River, former member of EACI, September 23, 2000.

participating in decision making processes and allowed a handful of corrupt leaders to make decisions for them.

The oppression and fear that pervaded the Aguán Valley during the 1980’s did not succeed in permanently discouraging civil society groups in Sabá. After almost a decade of quiescence, residents from the area slowly began to organize again in the late 1980’s. However, people united to a lesser degree than previously and avoided using a leftist discourse. Moreover, the types of organizations that were formed during this period and the people who joined them were different from those who had been organized during the 1970’s.

The Catholic Church succeeded in establishing some of the first community groups in Sabá during the late 1980’s. Between 1986 and 1988 three CEBs were founded in this municipality, two of which were still in existence in 2000. Although these groups analyzed their socio-political reality in light of biblical teachings, as do most CEBs in Latin America, they did not become politically active. Instead, they confined their activities to a mere discussion and analysis of these realities. A few CEB members did begin working in the Socorro Jurídico program, but they engaged in non-confrontational and defensive political activities.

Labor unions also resurface after an absence of nearly fifteen years. Local chapters of teacher labor unions were established in Sabá during the mid-1980’s. At first, teachers were hesitant to join these groups because teachers’ unions had been heavily

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84 Interview with Mercedes Pacheco, one of the first CEB members in Sabá, September 29, 2000.

persecuted elsewhere in the country during the preceding years. Nevertheless, the membership of these groups gradually increased. Another labor union was created among non-member workers of EACI in 1986. The Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Empresa Asociativa de Isletas (SITRAEACI), as this worker’s group was called, soon became active in demanding just pay and labor treatment from the cooperative enterprise for whom they worked. In 1988 they prevented EACI from dismissing hundreds of its members and succeeded in signing a collective labor contract signed between itself and its employers soon thereafter.

*Patronatos* or local community councils also were animated during the late 1980’s. Individually, *patronatos* in Sabá, as elsewhere in the country, often had been subject to political manipulation. However, in 1988 several rural *patronatos* united to form a local, political pressure group: the Frente Popular de Organizaciones Populares de Sabá (FREPOCSA or Popular Front of Popular Organizations from Sabá). The organization arose due to a desire to expand the municipality’s urban radius and obtain land for needy families. In order to prevent military repression of the group, FREPOCSA leaders sought permission from the commander of La Ceiba’s fourth battalion before engaging in any activities. Once such permission was obtained, the group started pressuring the municipal government for help. They staged marches, street blockades and even took over local government offices for a twelve day period. Through such means FREPOCSA

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86 Interview with Rolando Canizales, Director del Frente de Organizaciones Magisteriales (FOM), September 23, 2000.

succeeded not only in acquiring land for needy families, but also in obtaining road and electrification projects for newly-created urban areas.88

Although there was a clear resurgence of popular organizations during the late 1980’s, these groups remained too fragmented and weak to have any significant effect on national or regional-level political decisions. But as discussion increased during the 1989 presidential election over the country’s need to implement a structural adjustment package, pass a new law of municipalities and reverse the agrarian reform process, the Catholic Church began uniting the different organizations in the Aguán Valley so as to form a political pressure group that could represent the interests of the area before the central government.

The Church invited all the popular organizations in the area to meet in 1990 in order to discuss the possibility of establishing such an united front. Attendees represented a heterogeneous mix of groups that included cooperatives, *patronatos*, labor unions and religious organizations. Group representatives decided to meet frequently in order to monitor political events in the country and discuss ways of responding to them. Thus was born the *Asamblea Permanente de las Organizaciones Populares del Aguán* (APOPA). The cooperatives, labor unions, and *patronatos* from Sabá all joined this group. APOPA began protesting various national-level, political developments such as the Law for Agricultural Modernization and a new structural adjustment package. The group was quite belligerent in its protests. In 1991, for example, it mobilized approximately 12,000 people from the region and occupied the Aguán bridge in Sabá. APOPA also participated in three national-level public protests together with other

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88 Interview with Rolando Canizales, Organizer of (FREPOCSA), September 23, 2000.
Honduran civil society groups. The Catholic Church played a critical role in APOPA’s activities. It helped rally protesters and supplied the financial and logistical support needed to mobilize them. The hope was that as the group became stronger and more consolidated, the Church would retreat its support. Unfortunately, this organization did not evolve in the manner hoped. As APOPA’s belligerence increased, external forces began trying to orient the group in one of two different directions. Leaders of leftists political organizations began infiltrating APOPA and trying to radicalize the movement while local politicians, military officials and wealthy landowners tried corrupting and pacifying cooperative group leaders as they had done in the past. Although the Church worked to increase the socio-political awareness and organization of APOPA, the support it offered was unable to counter these other external forces. After two years of existence APOPA was unable to adopt political stances independently of the Church. In 1993 the diocese completely withdrew its support from the group and allowed it to disintegrate.89

Not coincidentally, the agrarian reform groups from Sabá began to fragment at around this period. Congress had passed the Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector in 1992 which allowed reform groups in the country to partition and sell the land they had been given by INA. Politicians, military officials and wealthy landowners corrupted coop leaders to convince fellow members that dividing and/or selling their landholdings would be more beneficial for them than continuing with their cooperative ventures.90


90 Interview with Cenen Martinez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000.
agrarian reform groups of the same. These attempts to reverse the agrarian reform in the
area were not merely limited to a few corrupt individuals. The state was also an
accomplice. During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s INA began distributing land titles to
reform groups. In addition, various government agencies offered to condone reform
groups loans if they sold their properties. Given the high debt of many reform
beneficiaries and their distrust towards both their leaders and the cooperative movement,
more generally, it was relatively easy to convince them to sell. EACI was the first to do
this. Its members sold their banana plantations to SFCO for 67 million lempiras, a fourth
of their property’s value. Other reform groups soon followed. Although the promise of
short-term, financial gain helped convince reform beneficiaries to sell their landholdings,
most also agreed to do this because they no longer trusted their leaders and wanted to
escape the government’s oppression and domination. Only three cooperatives still
existed in Sabá in 2000.91

San Marcos

San Marcos has had a significant level of social organization for at least half a
century. The first, formal associations arose in this municipality in the 1950’s. Although
labor unions have not been as prominent here as they have in the other two municipalities
just reviewed, San Marcos has had active cooperative and church groups. NGOs have
also had a significant presence here since the 1970’s. Community organizations in San
Marcos have evolved quite differently from those in the other municipalities under
consideration. Unlike Sabá, the national government has intervened only slightly in the

91 Raúl Rubén and Francisco Fúnez, *La compra-venta de tierras de la reforma agraria* (Tegucigalpa:
Editorial Guaymuras, 1993); Mario Posas, *La autogestión en el agro Hondureño: el caso de la Empresa
Asociativa de Isletas (EACI)* (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Universitaria, 1992): epílogo; interview with Cenen
Martínez, regional INA official (1977-2001), September 13, 2000; and interviews with various former
cooperative members during the month of September 2000.
creation and growth of civil society. Moreover, unlike Potrerillos and Sabá, few residents have organized in order to seek labor or financial justice in the face of larger economic forces. Rather, most of the groups that have been established here have been created in order to pursue the self-development of this region. The following section will review the organizational history of San Marcos, highlighting those unique experiences that have made this municipality what it is today.

The Catholic Church has been active in training and organizing San Marcos’ residents since the late 1960’s when the Catholic parish of the area began training lay, religious leaders as Delegados de la Palabra. These individuals led religious services in their communities, read and interpreted the Bible when no priests were available and offered religious education to others. Eventually, almost every community in San Marcos had a Delegado de la Palabra. Although most of these individuals were illiterate, the training they received from the Church empowered them by encouraging them to become outspoken leaders of their communities. The leadership positions adopted by Delegados de la Palabra often transcended their purely religious role. In the years following their training, many of these individuals went on to become leaders or at least members of other local organizations in the area.92

The cooperative movement began evolving in San Marcos much earlier than in the other municipalities under study here. The first Honduran cooperative was founded in San Marcos in 1957. That year a group of female residents formed the Cooperativa Industrial Conservadora de Alimentos Limitada (CICAL). The group produced pickled fruit and vegetable jars as well as fruit preserves for sale in local markets. Although the

organization has managed to persist for over forty years, it has not grown significantly since its creation. CICAL still maintains a small-scale production and continues to be dominated by women. In addition, the organization has a weak level of organization. CICAL is not self-sufficient and has depended on the financial and technical support of various national and regional organizations throughout its history.93

A second cooperative was established in San Marcos in 1967. At the time, there were no banks in the area94 and transportation to other parts of the country was difficult. Consequently, there was no financial service institution in the municipality. The Cooperativa de Ahorro y Credito Rio Grande was created in order to fill this void. The cooperative was born under the tutelage of the USAID-backed Honduran Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (FACACH or Federación de Cooperativas de Ahorro y Crédito de Honduras) who began promoting rural credit unions in the country during the 1960’s.95 The Rio Grande cooperative functions much like a bank. Membership is open to all residents of the area. They are encouraged to save their money with the cooperative and, in exchange, are offered both a percentage interest return on their deposits and affordable loans. FACACH subsidized the Rio Grande’s deposits during its first few years of existence. In 1982 the cooperative participated in a USAID program aimed at improving the financial sustainability of rural credit unions. The Rio Grande’s deposits

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95 For more on the USAID-backed origins of FACACH see Aldo A. Cardona Arango, Las cooperativas en Honduras, (Tegucigalpa: Instituto de Investigación y Formación Cooperativa, 1979): 53-56.
and reserves markedly increased as a result of this program. \textsuperscript{96} Today the \textit{Cooperativa Rio Grande} remains one of the largest financial service providers in the area.

As the cooperative movement began to grow in this municipality, two non-profit, service organizations also were established here. A local chapter of the Lion’s Club was founded in 1966 by some of the more affluent residents of San Marcos in order to help raise money and sponsor development projects in the area. Although this organization has received financial assistance from the Lions Club International in the past, most of its development projects have been sponsored with money raised by the local chapter. A similar organization, Hermandad de Honduras, was established in San Marcos in 1976. Hermandad was created due to the motivation and leadership of a North American priest, Rev. James Francis McTager, who was working in the area at the time. Initially, the organization was associated with Hermandad Inc., a U.S.-based agency that promotes community development in Latin America. Together, both organizations initiated various development programs and constructed a rural leadership training center in San Marcos. USAID offered significant support to these endeavors during the late 1970’s and 1980’s in the hopes that such development projects would prevent the rural population of the area from participating in the armed revolution that was embroiling neighboring Central American countries. The Hermandad branch in San Marcos became independent from Hermandad Inc. in 1985 and adopted the name of Hermandad de Honduras. USAID also withdrew its support from the local organization at around this period. Despite this, Hermandad de Honduras has sustained its operations through the support of other international organizations and the distribution of rural, micro-credit.

Today, Hermandad de Honduras is one of the largest NGOs in the country. Although it is based in San Marcos, the organization works throughout Western Honduras.\(^{97}\)

Eight agrarian reform groups also were established in San Marcos from the 1970’s to the 1990’s (See Table 6-3). Most of them were EACs and all were associated with either the *Unión Nacional de Campesinos* (UNC) or FECORAH. The UNC is a peasant federation with a socialist-communitarian ideology which has often placed it at odds with the national government.\(^{98}\) Not surprisingly, the reform groups affiliated with it received significantly less government support than the coops in Sabá. INA training courses were

<table>
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<th>Name of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Land Area Granted</th>
<th>Suitable for Cultivat</th>
<th>Year Establ</th>
<th>Type of Organ</th>
<th># of Original Members</th>
<th>Hectares per Member</th>
<th>National Organ. Affiliation</th>
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<td>Platanares</td>
<td>77 has</td>
<td>10 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.18 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Granzal #1</td>
<td>42 has</td>
<td>27 has</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.4 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flor de Café</td>
<td>48 has</td>
<td>42 has</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.0 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recuperación 18 de Nov.</td>
<td>95 has</td>
<td>85 has</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.32 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisas de Colopeca</td>
<td>35 has</td>
<td>31 has</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Coop</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.69 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Granzal #2</td>
<td>25 has</td>
<td>25 has</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.56 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efrain Diaz Gale</td>
<td>20 has</td>
<td>15 has</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.05 has</td>
<td>FECORAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 de Nov.</td>
<td>36 has</td>
<td>28 has</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.24 has</td>
<td>UNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL 8 groups</strong></td>
<td><strong>376 has</strong></td>
<td><strong>263 has</strong></td>
<td><strong>var.</strong></td>
<td><strong>var.</strong></td>
<td><strong>210</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.80 has</strong></td>
<td><strong>variable</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information on this chart is derived from INA, *Inventario de grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria*, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1995) and INA, *Información básica de los grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria*, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1994).


\(^{98}\) Martiniano Lombrana, *Historia del movimiento campesino de Honduras*, 20-23.
scant and credit often difficult to obtain. In addition, there were significantly fewer agrarian reform beneficiaries in San Marcos than in either Potrerillos or Sabá, and reform groups here received less cultivable land on average than their counterparts in the other two municipalities (See Table 6-4). Despite these obstacles, the three EACs that were established in San Marcos during the 1970’s had a strong collective conscious and worked closely together. Those reform groups that were established during the 1980’s and 1990’s were not as well organized as their predecessors. By then, INA had started encouraging more individualistic forms of organizations and capitalist notions of private property. In addition, FECORAH had been co-opted by the state and the UNC had been weakened substantially. The lack of support received by reform groups in the area and the difficulties they encountered cultivating the little land they shared contributed to

Table 6-4  A comparison of agrarian reform benefits in Potrerillos, Sabá and San Marcos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Potrerillos</th>
<th>Sabá</th>
<th>San Marcos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Land Area in Each Municipality</td>
<td>83.3 km²</td>
<td>370 km²</td>
<td>161 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8330 has)</td>
<td>(37,000 has)</td>
<td>(16,100 has)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Land Area Granted through the Agrarian Reform Program</td>
<td>989 has</td>
<td>6384 has</td>
<td>376 has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Total Land in Municipality Granted</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Granted Suitable for Cultivation</td>
<td>949 has</td>
<td>6068 has</td>
<td>263 has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Land Granted Suitable Cultivation</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Reform Group Beneficiaries</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Land Granted per Beneficiary</td>
<td>2.45 has</td>
<td>16.54 has</td>
<td>1.80 has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Cultivable Land Granted per Beneficiary</td>
<td>2.35 has</td>
<td>15.72 has</td>
<td>1.25 has</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
membership desertion. By December of 1994 only 161 of the original 210 reform group members remained part of a cooperative or EAC.\textsuperscript{99}

The political context of San Marcos changed drastically during the 1980’s. Thousands of Salvadoran peasants migrated to Honduras during this decade in response to their army’s offensive against FMLN-controlled areas of the country. Initially, three camps were established in Honduras near the border to offer refugee for Salvador migrants and facilitate their return home once the violence there subsided. Both Honduran and Salvadoran military officials accused these refugees housed there of collaborating with and offering safe harbor to FMLN troops. In order to avoid problems of guerrilla infiltration, the camp in La Virtud, Lempira which was less than three miles from the Salvadoran border was relocated to an isolated area of San Marcos known as Mesa Grande in November 1981.\textsuperscript{100} Nearly 11,500 Salvadoran refugees occupied this camp until 1987.\textsuperscript{101} This represented a sum almost equal to the entire population of San Marcos during this period. Although most refugees were repatriated to El Salvador in 1988 and 1989 after the signing of the Central American Peace Accords, the last refugees did not leave Mesa Grande until 1997.\textsuperscript{102}

The presence of thousands of Salvadoran refugees in San Marcos had a significant impact on the native residents of the area. Although the new camp had been moved almost twenty-five miles from the Salvadoran border, military officials continued to view

\textsuperscript{99} INA, \textit{Inventario de grupos campesinos de la reforma agraria}, (Tegucigalpa: INA, 1995).


\textsuperscript{101} Inter Press Service, “Honduras Home for 40,000 Refugees says UNHCR,” February 4, 1986.

the refugees there as communists and FMLN sympathizers. They thus took great care to contain the refugees’ alleged ideological inclination and revolutionary activity. In addition to preventing people from leaving the Mesa Grande Camp, military troops regularly patrolled the municipality. People found walking the streets at night would be detained and peasants seen carrying a weapon or traveling to or from the direction of the Salvadoran border would either be captured, beaten or instantly killed. Many residents grew to fear simply walking with a machete to their farm lands for fear of repression.

San Marcos was changed by the numerous organizations that came to work with the Salvadoran refugees. The Evangelical Committee for National Emergencies (CEDEN or Comité Evangelica de Emergencias Nacioanles) and CARITAS de Honduras, the organizations that execute social development programs on behalf of Protestant and the Catholic Churches in Honduras respectively, were among the first organizations to begin working with Salvadoran refugees. The Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, World Vision, Hermandad and other such NGOs soon joined in the relief work, as well. These organizations provided shelter, food, water, clothes and basic health services to the refugee population. In addition, they worked to protect those in the Mesa Grande Camp from human rights abuses. Most of the funds required to sustain this type of relief work was provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees


104 Interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999.

105 Interview with a peasant from San Marcos, May 6, 2000.
(UNHCR) who channeled its money through the various organizations in the area.\textsuperscript{106} Initially, CEDEN coordinated relief activity. Although not all organizations received the same amount of aid or support, they maintained a strong level of coordination.\textsuperscript{107}

The human rights work conducted by the various organizations in San Marcos became very contentious. Those working with Salvadoran refugees were branded as communists and frequently harassed, threatened and detained.\textsuperscript{108} In 1983 the Protestant churches that supported CEDEN asked that this organization cease working with the refugee population. Over thirty of CEDEN’s employees refused to do so and instead chose to found a new, independent NGO, the \textit{Comisión Cristiana de Desarrollo} (CCD), an organization inspired by a social-Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{109} In addition, many of the aid organizations in the area united to form the \textit{Asociación de Organismos No Gubernamentales de Honduras} (ASONOG or Association of Honduran Non-Governmental Organizations) in 1988 in order to better defend themselves against political attacks and make demands upon the Honduran state.\textsuperscript{110}

Although local citizens in San Marcos acknowledged the positive work that the UNHCR and various NGOs were doing with the refugee population, many also resented

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{106} Interview with Francisco Machado, Executive President of ASONOG, April 11, 2000.


\textsuperscript{109} The new organization was first named Comite de Desarrollo y Emergencia, but the name was changed in 1988 to CCD. Interview with Noemi Espinoza, President of CCD, November 30, 1999; Interview with Noemi Mejia, Program Director for CCD, November 29, 1999.

\textsuperscript{110} Interview with Francisco Machado, Executive President of ASONOG, April 11, 2000.
\end{footnotesize}
the massive assistance given to Salvadorans. Residents thought it unfair that they had to endure the pressure of thousands of refugees as well as suffer military hostility and human rights abuses as a result of them yet receive no compensation for this. They also resented that the Salvadoran population in Mesa Grande was offered many basic services not available to them. At the time, San Marcos was a very poor municipality with little infrastructure. Eventually, local citizens protested this unequal treatment and demanded that they too be granted development assistance.

The United Nations responded to these demands with the Central American Development Project for Displaced Populations, Refugees and Repatriated Exiles (known in Spanish as the Programa de Desarrollo para Repatriados or PRODERE). The idea for PRODERE arose a year after the signing of the 1987 Central American Peace Plan. The program was executed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and financed through a $115 million contribution from the Italian government. Although PRODERE primarily sought to help resettle Central American refugees, its general goal was to rehabilitate the lives of those who had been affected by the region’s population displacement in the 1980’s. San Marcos qualified for assistance under this program because its citizens were adversely affected by the refugees in Mesa Grande.

PRODERE was initiated in 1992 in San Marcos in order to improve both the physical and social fabric of life in the municipality. The UN program offered residents the funds they requested to implement self-identified projects on the condition that they

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112 Interview with Alberto Rodezno, founding member of Hermandad de Honduras, July 13, 2000.

have a group in place to execute and supervise these.\textsuperscript{114} PRODERE thus provided a strong financial incentive for people to organize. Residents who had never participated in community groups in the past began to do so. The organizational fervor encouraged by PRODERE helped weaken traditional patron-client relations by teaching people that if they did not participate in their own development, they would not receive assistance. Some residents believed that PRODERE emphasized community organization more than basic infrastructure projects.\textsuperscript{115}

PRODERE together with COPECO helped form the first *Comité de Emergencias* in San Marcos in 1992. The group’s formation was preceded by a workshop which taught residents about their municipality’s risks to, past experiences with and historic responses to disaster. Those interested in joining the *Comité de Emergencia* were then offered courses on how to prepare and best respond to such unexpected events.\textsuperscript{116} PRODERE also helped restructure the *patronatos* or community councils in San Marcos. Members of these groups had traditionally been appointed by mayors and been more instruments of political manipulation than true representatives of their communities. PRODERE suggested that new local councils be established based on popular elections. These local bodies, named *Comisiones de Desarrollo Comunal* (CODECO), were to represent both residents and organized groups from each neighborhood and *aldea*.\textsuperscript{117} Today, the terms

\textsuperscript{114} Interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999.

\textsuperscript{115} Interview with Olvin Romero, Mayor of San Marcos (1994-1997), July 18, 2000.

\textsuperscript{116} Municipalidad de San Marcos, *Informe general de las acciones realizadas en el municipio*, (San Marcos, Ocotepeque: Municipalidad de San Marcos, 1994): anexo VII.

\textsuperscript{117} Presidencia de la República, Comisión Presidencial del Estado, *Cuadernos de descentralización Volumen 3, mapeo social de Honduras: estudios de caso sobre la participación comunitaria*, (Tegucigalpa: República de Honduras, 1994): 41.
CODECO and *patronato* are used interchangeably to refer to the same group. Although the members of these organizations are generally more active in problem-solving than regular citizens,\(^{118}\) they have become democratic representatives of their communities.

Some residents argue that San Marcos was already well organized before PRODERE’s arrival and that this UN program merely strengthened the organizational process that had been initiated beforehand.\(^{119}\) A few years before PRODERE was initiated, for example, a few local citizens had become concerned about the increasing forest destruction and environmental degradation of their municipality. In 1990 they established the *Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos, Ocotepeque* (AESMO or Ecological Association of San Marcos, Ocotepeque) in order to address these issues. However, AESMO sponsored few environmental projects during its first few years of existence due to limited funds. AESMO sought support from PRODERE soon after this project was initiated in San Marcos. PRODERE responded by helping the group obtain legal recognition from the state, granting them 15,000 *lempiras* to initiate conservation projects and supporting some of their environmental education programs.\(^{120}\) Other pre-existing groups were offered similar support from this UN program during the 1990’s.

PRODERE’s stimulation of citizen groups was reinforced by the work of others in the area. CCD, which had initially only worked with refugees in San Marcos began encouraging community organizations and participation with local residents there after

\(^{118}\) Ibid, 44.

\(^{119}\) Interview with Fernando Espinoza, former director of AESMO, July 13, 2000; interview with Alberto Rodezno, founding member of Hermandad de Honduras, July 13, 2000; and interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, November 19, 2000.

\(^{120}\) Interview with Victor Saravia, President of AESMO, November 17, 1999 and AESMO, “Antecedentes de AESMO” unpublished document available with author, (San Marcos: AESMO, 1999).
1990. Their work primarily focused on rural settlements. Six leaders (half men, half women) from these areas were selected and asked to help organize their neighbors. Then, using popular education methods, these groups were asked to identify ten problems in their communities and find ways of solving them. Although CCD counseled and financially supported these local organizations, the decision-making process was left up to residents.\textsuperscript{121} Hermandad de Honduras initiated a similar process in the early 1990’s. They began forming agricultural groups composed of approximately fifteen community members who were offered training on how to work together to implement environmentally-friendly agricultural techniques.\textsuperscript{122} They also helped form local health groups. All of Hermandad’s projects educated participants on the importance of being organized.\textsuperscript{123} Neither CCD nor Hermandad had been able to distribute popular education materials or encourage such group formation during the previous decade because this work had been viewed as a politically threatening within the Cold War context.\textsuperscript{124}

The Catholic Church further motivated people’s organization during the 1990’s. The Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, to which San Marcos belongs, asked its parishes to begin encouraging the formation of Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs) in 1993.\textsuperscript{125} CEBs had been promoted elsewhere in Central America during the previous two decades

\textsuperscript{121} Interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999.

\textsuperscript{122} Interviews with Jorge Alcides Linares and Melencio La Rama, extension workers for Hermandad de Honduras, November 22, 1999.

\textsuperscript{123} Hermandad de Honduras, Memoria 1993, (San Marcos: PROAVEH, 1994).

\textsuperscript{124} Interview with Noemi Espinoza, President of CCD, November 30, 1999.

but had become associated with armed uprisings there.\textsuperscript{126} In order to prevent politicians or regular citizens from either associating CEBs with revolutionary movements or fearing these organizations, the Diocese renamed these groups “\textit{pequeñas comunidades}” (or little communities).\textsuperscript{127} The \textit{Delegados de la Palabra} in San Marcos were asked to help form these new church organizations. In order to prevent them from falling into their old, paternalistic, leadership roles, \textit{Delegados de la Palabra} were offered training courses which explained to them the structure and purpose of CEBs. In addition, CEB members were given booklets to guide their weekly meetings. Initially, it was difficult to encourage people to join these new organizations. However, after a year and a half of work, CEBs began to proliferate in San Marcos. By the end of the century there were thirty seven of these religious groups in the municipality, and each had a membership ranging from twelve to thirty individuals. CEBs encouraged participants to read the Bible, interpret their socio-political reality in light of scripture and try to improve their surroundings. Thus these groups complemented the participatory development projects promoted by other organizations in the area.\textsuperscript{128}

Unlike CCD, Hermandad and the Catholic Church, PRODERE motivated the organization and participation of local residents in order to change the traditional style of governance in San Marcos. PRODERE, therefore, worked with both citizens and local politicians in order to improve the level of communication between them. One way this was achieved was through \textit{cabildos abiertos} or town hall meetings. A new Law of

\textsuperscript{126} For one account of how CEBs contributed to the rise of revolutions in Central America see Philip Berryman, \textit{The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions}, (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

\textsuperscript{127} Interview with Father Andrés, Preist of the Catholic Church in Ocotepeque, November 20, 1999.

\textsuperscript{128} Interview with Sister Francisca from the Catholic Church in Sabá, July 13, 2000.
Municipalities passed in 1990 stipulated that each municipality should have at least six *cabildos abiertos* per year. PRODERE helped make this a reality in San Marcos by providing the financial and logistical support necessary to advertise, organize and transport people to such meetings.\(^{129}\) The first *cabildos* in San Marcos were not limited to just the adult population of the area. A children’s *cabildos* was sponsored there as well. Child attendees were asked to identify community problems, suggest solutions to them, make recommendations to their municipal government and determine how they could contribute to solving these problems.\(^{130}\) Through such means, citizens were taught at an early age how they could participate in local-level governance.

Many of the instances of participation that PRODERE helped establish were consolidated into a mutually reinforcing, multi-tiered system that linked local, municipal, and regional organizations in the area. A municipal-level, representative body called *Comité de Desarrollo Municipal* (CODEM) was established in San Marcos in 1992. CODEMs advanced citizen political participation beyond the arena of consultation provided by *cabildos abiertos* to a permanent structure of local, co-government. Through CODEMs representatives of organized groups in a community are allowed to advise municipal governments and assist them in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects. The 1990 Law of Municipalities required CODEMs to be established in every municipality in the country. However, this requirement had not been enforced. San Marcos was the first municipality in Honduras to form a CODEM. This


consultative body was established in response to the strong motivation of PRODERE. Initially, the mayor of San Marcos was hesitant to accept this new political structure; but, after being convinced of its benefit, became a supporter of it. The first CODEM in San Marcos was composed of elected representatives from every patronato and organized group in the municipality. Since the Law of Municipalities contemplated a smaller and less representative consultative body, six committees were created as part of this citizen body in order to allow the participation of a greater number of people. These committees proposed and implemented projects related to infrastructure, production, health, education, and environmental protection. The first CODEM of San Marcos was extremely active: it hosted forty six reunions and helped mobilize 570 people in its first year of existence. Based on this model of citizen political participation, PRODERE helped establish similar consultative bodies throughout the rest of Ocotepeque. In addition, the central government began encouraging the formation of

133 Interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, November 19, 1999 and interview with Jesus Orlando Guerra, Mayor of San Marcos (1990-1994 and 1998-2001), July 17, 2000.
134 The Law of Municipalities does not require members of the CODEM to be elected, but rather states that these should be appointed by the municipal government. It further indicates that the members of the CODEM must be equal to the number of regents in the municipal government. In the case of San Marcos, that means the CODEM would have had to be composed of eight members.
135 Municipalidad de San Marcos, Informe general de las acciones realizadas en el municipio, (San Marcos, Ocotepeque: Municipalidad de San Marcos, 1994): anexo XII.
136 Ibid, 3.
CODEMs in other areas of the country soon after this department’s positive experience with them.  

A regional-level organization called the Asociación para el Desarrollo del Valle de Sensenti (ADEVAS or Development Association for the Valley of Sensenti) was also established by PRODERE in 1993. The idea for ADEVAS came from an informal, cooperation network that had arisen in the area during the early 1990’s. Soon after PRODERE was initiated, the mayors from San Marcos and its neighboring municipalities began meeting with each other and local NGOs in order to coordinate development projects.  

PRODERE wanted to strengthen this intra-municipal cooperation and make it more sustainable. It did this by establishing ADEVAS, an umbrella organization integrated by the Cooperativa Rio Grande, Hermandad de Honduras, AESMO, two teachers unions, a coffee association, several regionally-based national government agencies and the mayors and CODEMs from seven municipalities. 

Although ADEVAS was originally conceived as a coordination agency, practical considerations soon forced it to evolve into an NGO. As PRODERE prepared to discontinue its operations in Honduras, it had a significant pool of money that had not been used. The coordinators of the UN program chose to distribute part of this money as rural credit to farmers, train local citizens on how to manage it and help them form part of


138 Interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, November 19, 1999.


140 Interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, July 17, 2000; interview with Santos Arita, Coordinator of CODEPO, November 18, 2000.
ADEVAS who would then be charged with the long term management and reinvestment
of these funds. Today, ADEVAS functions primarily like a rural credit association.
However, it promotes the coordination of governmental and non-governmental bodies in
the region through its administrative structure.

Based on the successful model of ADEVAS, PRODERE encouraged the formation
of a department-level, cooperation agency in 1995: the *Comisión de Desarrollo
Departamental de Ocotepeque* (CODEPO). This organization attempted to integrate all
the municipal governments, organized civil society groups and central government
offices in Ocotepeque into one cooperating body that could better promote the
development of the department. Ideally, CODEPO should have represented various
regional groups from the department, but when it was established in 1995, ADEVAS was
the only regional organization in Ocotepeque. Consequently, CODEPO was organized
with the representation of ADEVAS, the sixteen municipal governments and various
national government extension offices in the department. Initially, civil society
organizations were not as well represented in CODEPO as were governmental bodies.
However, towards the end of 1999 various civil society groups were encouraged to join
CODEPO’s structure largely due to the pressures exerted by one such group, ASONOG.
In addition, regional organizations similar to ADEVAS started being incorporated into
CODEPO as they were created. Although CODEMs are not directly represented in this
organization, CODEPO reinforces their importance by accepting only those projects or
proposals approved by them. CODEPO has not only helped coordinate development
projects in Ocotepeque but has enabled citizens and local governments from the
department to have better access to both the central government and international aid
organizations. CODEPO represents the pinnacle of the multi-level organizational structure that PRODERE initiated in San Marcos during the 1990’s.\textsuperscript{141}

\textbf{Dolores Merendón}

Dolores Merendón has an organizational and political history that differs significantly from that of the other three areas selected for study. Residents have been isolated almost completely from national and international political economic forces. No large, capitalist enterprises have infiltrated this region of the country and the national government has almost no presence here. This together with the region’s dependence on subsistence agriculture have discouraged the creation of community groups.

The world of national politics has been quite foreign to residents of Dolores Merendón. Whereas Potrerillos was part of the country’s development corridor, Sabá and San Marcos were exposed to the Cold War struggle and all three were part of the agrarian reform program, Dolores Merendón was excluded from any such events of national significance. The residents of this region did not even receive daily newspapers in 2000—a service available to all of our other selected municipalities. Short-wave radio stations did broadcast national news information here. However, 85\% of those surveyed admitted they received little or no news at all.

The subsistence economy and political isolation of the region encouraged the inhabitants of Dolores Merendón to focus primarily on their household’s needs and take little interest in matters outside of their home. Males worked daily on their family farms while the women cooked, cleaned and took care of their children. There was no significant history of social organization here. Although there were instances of

\textsuperscript{141} Interview with Santos Arita, Coordinator of CODEPO, November 18, 2000.
cooperation, most of these tended to be among relatives. Fathers, sons and brothers frequently worked together to plant and harvest crops. Similarly, female relatives assisted each other with child rearing and household chores. Non-relatives periodically cooperated with one another also in order to resolve common problems. For instance, families living near a creek periodically united to build a wooden bridge when the old one fell or assisted each other in cases of illness or injury. But collaborative efforts such as these were the exception rather than the rule. In general, residents spent most of their time caring for their household’s needs and had little interest in working communally with those outside their family. The individualism of the region was evident also in the distribution of living structures. When field research was conducted in this municipality, houses were dispersed across a vast and mountainous terrain as if to mark a physical separation between residents. Even within an *aldea* or rural settlement, houses tended to be scattered into small groups that shared a familial bond.

People who lived outside of Dolores Merendón but traveled to work on community service activities there reported that residents were often unwilling to help them meet their basic necessities. Representatives from the NGO, ASONOG, explained that when they first started working in this municipality they were unable to find people to sell them a plate of food—a problem they had not encountered in other communities of comparable size and poverty. After some begging during several trips to the area, they were finally able to find a family willing to provide them with lunch. Interestingly, this family had

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142 The information from this paragraph is based on personal observations and on conversations with various community members during the month of April 2000.

143 Interview with Efraín Deras, director of ASONOG’s activities in Ocotepeque, April 3, 2000 and interview with Jennifer Erazo, ASONOG technician, April 3, 2000.
a pre-existing willingness to engage in profit-making activities because they managed a local store. One school teacher also explained that although he tries to bring his own food from home because of the difficulties of obtaining meals in the area, neighbors have at times refused to even heat his lunch. They have been uncooperative with him despite the fact that he had distributed free clothes and school supplies to local children.¹⁴⁴

The individualism of Dolores Merendón sometimes manifested itself in a warped and destructive forms. For example, three families from San Jeronimo, the largest aldea in the municipality, had been engaging in a feud for several years. Residents reported that when the men from any one of these families became inebriated (a condition which arose quite frequently), they launched armed attacks on each other. While collecting surveys in this aldea, a conglomerate of approximately fifteen houses had to be excluded from study because some of the men there were drunk and firing gunshots at each other from their respective houses. A week later, a member of one of these households resulted dead. Although the three feuding families in San Jeronimo were among the more notoriously violent residents of this municipality, they were not the only ones to receive or launch armed attacks. Incidents of violence seemed to be somewhat common in the area. The doctor and nurse assigned to this district in 1999-2000 explained that they frequently received patients with machete cuts, gun shot wounds and other such injuries.¹⁴⁵ Women were sometimes victims of sexual assaults, as well. Although violent events such as these occurred periodically in the other municipalities under study, the police intervened to keep these incidents in check and punish perpetrators. In Dolores

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Carlos Espinoza, teacher in Las Toreras, Dolores Merendón, June 5, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the nurse from the Health Center in San Jeronimo, April 26, 2000 and interview with Dr. Fernando Estebez, June 6, 2000.
Merendón, however, there was no police presence. Although law officers had come to the area in the past in order to investigate criminal activities, they had been forced out of town by local residents.

The individualistic and often antagonistic behavior found in Dolores Merendón is not uncommon to other peasant settings. Several, social science studies have found that life in small, rural villages is often typified by distrust, a lack of cooperation and an almost exclusive focus on individual and family concerns. The social dynamics of such peasant societies have been so interesting as to make them the subject of various works of film and literature. What remains unclear, however, is why such behavior arises. Some of the NGO representatives who work in Dolores believe that the extreme poverty and low education level of the area accounts for much of the introverted and antisocial behavior here. Some researchers have suggested that land tenure patterns and culture may be additional factors accounting for the social behavior in these and other similar villages. However, since the causes of group interaction in Dolores was not explored through field research, no definitive explanation for it may be offered here.


149 Interview with Efraín Deras, director of ASONOG’s activities in Ocotepeque, May 10, 2000 and interview with Alexander Villeda, ASONOG technician, April 19, 2000.

Despite the grim picture of individualistic and often warped behavior in this municipality, some community groups had been established in Dolores Merendón before the intervention of various NGO groups in 1999. However, all of these organizations were formed due to the incitement of external agents and either remained weak or disappeared soon after their creation. One such group was the Asociación de Padres de Familia (parents’ association) which existed in three of the four settlements in the municipality. These groups were established during the late 1990’s due to the leadership of local school teachers, none of whom were permanent residents of Dolores. Although some parents had agreed to attend these association meetings, they did so sporadically and with little apparent commitment. The Asociación de Padres de Familia seemed to exist more because of the constant encouragement of school teachers than due to residents’ initiatives. A women’s micro-enterprise also was established here in 1995 due to the technical and financial support of ADEVAS. The twelve women who joined this group were taught how to grow vegetable gardens and produce pickled vegetable jars for sale in their community. Not surprisingly, the group disintegrated once ADEVAS stopped supporting their work. Former members said they ceased working together because it was too difficult for them to acquire the jars and lids needed to produce and sell their products. Yet ex-members not only stopped selling their products. They also ceased growing family gardens and simply returned to their traditional diet of corn and beans. Only one women continued to cultivate vegetables for the purposes of household consumption in 2000.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Interviews with five former female members of this women’s micro-enterprise on April 26, 2000.
Residents did show a greater willingness to unite for religious purposes. Although there was no permanent Catholic priest in the municipality, nine CEBs had been established here between 1995 and 2000. Each of these had an average of ten to fifteen members. The groups meet regularly and were among the strongest organizations in Dolores Merendón. The three Evangelical churches in the municipality also had a small but loyal following. Members met two to three times a week to hear the Word of God, receive a message from their pastor and pray. People’s response to these religious groups revealed their desire to learn more about Christianity but not necessarily their interest in collaborating with neighbors. All of these organizations restricted their work to strengthening personal religiosity and undertook few activities aimed at benefiting the community as a whole.

**Conclusion**

The preceding discussion has tried to explain in the most detailed and descriptive manner possible the different organizational histories of the four municipalities selected for analysis. Potrerillos, Sabá and San Marcos have a history of moderate social organization. The former two have had active labor unions, agrarian reform groups and agricultural associations. Yet, most of these were weakened severely during the 1990’s due to a series of diverse, political economic factors. Community groups were encouraged and strengthened in San Marcos during this same period due to PRODERE. Consequently, civil society groups participated actively in local politics, at least for a few years. Although residents here became less socially and politically involved during the later part of the 1990’s, San Marcos had managed to maintain a moderately well organized civil society. This was not the case in Sabá and Potrerillos where many civil society groups had weakened or disappeared by that time. Nevertheless, the memory of
### Table 6-5  Organizational histories compared among the Municipalities under study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H₁ Experienced a Disaster</th>
<th>H₂ Has Received External Aid that Encourages Community Organization</th>
<th>No H₂ Has Not Received External Aid that Encourages Community Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabá, Colon</td>
<td>Moderate organizational history</td>
<td>Potrerillos, Cortés</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate organizational</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate organizational history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolores Merendón, Ocotepeque</td>
<td>No organizational history</td>
<td>San Marcos, Ocotepeque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No H₁ No Disaster</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate organizational history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

organization was still very much present in both areas. In addition, church-related groups and teachers unions had started to become active in Sabá during the 1990’s—something which had not occurred in Potrerillos. Dolores Merendón stands in sharp contrast to our other three municipal cases. It had no history of organization. Residents there were very individualistic and unaccustomed to cooperating with those outside of their families. Nevertheless, church groups had grown here during the late 1990’s, suggesting that some incipient form of associational life was developing. The following chapter will see how these municipalities responded to both disaster and foreign aid organizations given their historic patterns of social organization.
CHAPTER 7
MUNICIPAL-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AFTER MITCH AND AID

Introduction

The four municipalities under study here have been differentially affected by both Mitch and foreign aid organizations and reveal varied levels of responses to these external interventions. As was indicated in chapter four, Potrerillos and Sabá experienced the effects of a major natural disaster while San Marcos and Dolores Merendon did not. In response to this event, several aid organizations have sponsored reconstruction projects in Sabá which emphasize community organization. Development projects have also been initiated in Dolores Merendón. Although this latter municipality was affected by Mitch only minimally, several NGOs have begun working here in order to counter the extreme poverty in the area. Neither San Marcos nor Potrerillos had received a noticeable increase in external organization support when field research for this study was conducted. Each of these municipalities has responded differently to these external events. These responses may be due either completely to the independent variables being tested or partially to the different histories and characteristics of each place.

Potrerillos, which was affected by Hurricane Mitch but did not receive significant amounts of external aid support, has revealed no long-term change in its social organization and political participation. Although this municipality had a significant history of organization, particularly of labor union activity, this social activism had almost completely disappeared during the 1990’s. When Mitch arrived Potrerillos had
few and weak community organizations. In addition, most residents were politically uninvolved. Politics here was typified by traditional, clientelistic behavior. The advent of disaster did not induce any long term changes in this socio-political context. Although there was a brief period of heightened solidarity and community activism during the emergency period, this soon subsided and the residents relapsed into their pre-disaster state of behavior.

Sabá was affected by both a natural disaster and the intervention of various aid organizations. Like Potrerillos, this municipality had had an active organizational history which had suffered significant weakening in the 1990’s. However, people here had not been completely engrossed in clientelistic politics. Many residents had participated in public marches and other such political activities in the past through which they demanded that the national and local governments respond to their demands. This form of behavior gave Sabá a very unique socio-political history. In the immediate aftermath of Mitch residents responded in much the same way as did people in Potrerillos: residents helped neighbors and united in solving public service problems. Once the emergency period had passed, the emergent groups that had been formed during the previous months began to weaken and disband. However, the intervention of external aid agencies prevented a total relapse into inactivity. The agencies that began working in Sabá during the reconstruction period required that residents be well organized and involved in the projects that promised to benefit them. In addition to requiring this social cohesion and activity, these aid organizations supported it through training and workshops. Consequently, the residents of this municipality have remained relatively well active and are more organized now than they were during the pre-disaster period. Although it may
be too early to determine whether this heightened social activity has impacted political activity in the area, early evidence suggests that residents here are becoming more politically involved in response to the new training and support they are receiving. What remains to be seen is whether this increased socio-political activism will be sustainable in the long-run.

Dolores Merendón did not experience the effects of disaster. However, several NGOs have initiated development projects in this region since 1999. All are encouraging community members to become organized and undertake joint projects. This is a challenging objective given the little history of organization in this municipality and resident’s individualistic and family-centered behavior. Thus far, the inhabitants of this region have responded favorably to this external aid intervention. Several new working groups have been established and residents have begun working together on several projects. Although Dolores Merendón has not achieved the same level of organization as Sabá, it does now resemble the level of organization in Potrerillos. These changing patterns of behavior have not, however, been translated into increased political activity. Residents remain disinterested and disengaged from politics.

San Marcos has experienced no significant socio-political changes since the immediate pre-Mitch period, as was expected, for it did not experience either a disaster nor receive aid from external organizations in late 1998 and 1999 did the other three municipalities. In addition to serving as a test for the null hypothesis, this municipality reveals how the socio-political changes initiated by the intervention of external aid organizations may persist into the future. The following will discuss each of these cases
in greater detail, highlighting the specific ways they have responded to our two, independent variables.

**Potrerillos**

Potrerillos experienced significant damage as a result of Mitch. The Humuya and Blanco Rivers which dissect this municipality, overflowed and inundated the valley region and about half of the urban center of Potrerillos. The flooding destroyed or caused major damage to 28 kilometers of river dikes, fifteen bridges and 42.5 kilometers of unpaved roads. The bridge connecting Potrerillos to the northern town of San Pedro Sula was destroyed and the paved road connecting it to the capital was partially damaged and blocked by a mud slide. Consequently, residents were unable to leave the area or receive external assistance for over a week after the storm. The municipality’s entire water and sewage system was destroyed as well. Although none of the residents from Potrerillos died or disappeared as a result of Mitch, over 3000 people or about one fifth of the local population had to be evacuated.¹

Although Mitch caused the temporary displacement of thousands of people and devastated the municipality’s infrastructure and agricultural productivity, it had a less grave effect on individual households in the area. One adult representative from 379 out of the total 2860 houses in Potrerillos was surveyed as part of this dissertation research and asked whether their family had suffered any of the following as a result of Mitch:

- house damage
- crop damage
- some animal deaths
- total house loss
- total crop loss
- total animal loss

¹ This information is derived from a hand written tally of damages caused by Mitch that is stored in the Municipality of Potrerillos.
Based on people’s responses to these indicators, a Mitch Affect Index was developed. If a respondent said their family had experienced *either* some crop loss, some animal loss or some house damage, they were coded as having suffered minor damage due to Mitch. If they responded that they had suffered at least two of these types of effects, they were coded as having suffered significant damage. If the family lost either all their crops, all their animals or their entire house they were coded as having suffered major damage. If they lost all three of these possessions they were coded as having experienced a total loss. Finally, if a family had experienced none of these losses, they were coded as having suffered no damage. Based on this coding method it was determined that 43% of the households in Potrerillos experienced no damage due to Mitch, 18% experienced minor damage, 10% had significant damage, 24% had major damage and 34% experienced a total loss of their possessions.

The households that suffered the greatest losses were located in low-lying, rural areas while those in the urban heart of town and the few mountainous rural communities suffered little to no damage. A crosstab run between the rural/urban distribution of households in Potrerillos and their Mitch Effect Index revealed that nearly 70% of all rural households experienced either major damage or a total loss due to the storm while 75% of the urban ones experienced little or no damage. The chi-square of significance for this bivariate analysis was 122.943 with 4 degrees of freedom, allowing us to be over 99% confident that there is a significant association between the pre-Mitch location of households and the storm damage they suffered.

The residents of Potrerillos responded to the immediate, post-Mitch period with a heightened amount of solidarity. Residents who had a car or canoe helped the local Red
Cross and municipal authorities evacuate people from inundated areas while the one town doctor, public health personnel and volunteers worked around the clock in order to tend to the sick and injured. Some disaster victims were offered shelter and food by friends and relatives while churches, schools and other public buildings offered temporary shelters to the remaining flood victims. Farmers in the few mountainous communities of the municipality donated bags of basic grains which were then used by groups of housewives to cook and feed those in shelters.

The more formal organizations in Potrerillos also responded to this natural disaster as best they could. The local-level, *Comités de Emergencia* that had been established just months before Mitch’s arrival helped evacuate people in their communities before the floods and, thus, prevented deaths or injuries.2 *Patronatos* helped rescue neighbors and began meeting on an almost weekly basis in order to assess and report damages in their communities. Since Potrerillos did not have a municipal-level agency that could respond to the disaster, the mayor invited key leaders of the community (e.g., the town doctor, priest, several pastors, some teachers and members of the municipal government) to organize a municipal-level *Comité de Emergencia Municipal* that could coordinate relief efforts.

External emergency assistance began flowing into Potrerillos a few days after the storm when the bridge connection to San Pedro Sula was reestablished. The Red Cross, CARITAS, COPECO, OCDIH and the World Food Programme, among others, donated food and clothing to disaster victims. In addition, the Organization for International

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2 Interview with Román Garcia, Representative of Poterrillo’s Red Cross, March 29, 2000; interview with Hector Guardado, Mayor of Potrerillos (1994-2001), April 1, 2000 and interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, September 8, 1999.
Migration (OIM) provided the supplies needed to build temporary, nylon shelters for the homeless. The local Red Cross was assigned the task of managing the new shelter communities on November 1, 1999.\(^3\) The municipality coordinated its efforts with these organizations in order to feed and house disaster victims. As these agencies increased their emergency response activities, community activism and volunteerism gradually declined. The crisis, so it seemed, was being managed by those best able to confront this situation, and the active participation of the community was less necessary than during the days immediately after the disaster.

Nevertheless, some residents continued to recognize the need to organize in order to confront the on-going effects of Mitch. On December 20, 1998 a group of urban dwellers formed the *Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos*. The seventy two people who attended the group’s first meeting were concerned about the lack of potable water in the municipality and the local government’s inability to respond to this crisis. Some residents had started monopolizing the few wells in town and selling water drawn from them—an act which many viewed as immoral. The group mobilized to request help from the national government in addressing Potrerillos’ water crisis. They also undertook various public works projects such as the cleaning of local schools and parks.\(^4\)

Life in Potrerillos began to return to normal during the first weeks of 1999. The local Red Cross had stopped managing the shelters on December 31, 1998 because of a lack of government support and both CARITAS and COPECO had ended their

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\(^3\) Interview with Román García, Representative of Poterrillo’s Red Cross, March 29, 2000.

\(^4\) Interview with José Octavio López, President of the *Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos*, March 28, 2000.
emergency assistance.\textsuperscript{5} The flood waters had receded by then and schools were scheduled to begin in early February. Gradually, people began returning to their homes in order to clean, rebuild and replant.

Most of the residents in Potrerillos returned to their pre-Mitch way of life. The municipal-level Comité de Emergencia disintegrated after only a month of existence. The group’s relief work had been hampered by religious and partisan differences: the Catholic and Protestant churches had been hesitant to work together while those with Liberal or National Party affiliations had accused each other of politicizing aid.\textsuperscript{6} Local-level Comités de Emergencia also disbanded, as had occurred historically once crisis periods had passed. The Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos also fell into inactivity after March 1999 when residents gained access to water through underground pumps. Although residents continued to attend this group’s meetings, they showed little willingness to work together on community projects.\textsuperscript{7} The patronatos also reverted to a state of passivity and relative inactivity as citizens concentrated on rehabilitating their own lives and homes rather than on cooperative endeavors.

Yet the communities that had maintained a strong level of organization before Mitch either maintained or fortified their collective identity. The peasant families in the mountainous region of Potrerillos, for example, continued to work as closely as before. They had been well organized into EACs and OCDIH had helped them form patronatos, micro-enterprises, rural banks and women’s groups during the five years preceding

\textsuperscript{5} Interview with Román Garcia, Representative of Poterrillo’s Red Cross, March 29, 2000.


\textsuperscript{7} Interview with José Octavio López, President of the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos, March 28, 2000.
Mitch. Since these communities suffered little damage as a result of this storm, they were able to continue with their communal work just as they had done previously.

The three peasant groups that had come to Potrerillos from Guaymas also maintained their level of unity despite having experienced an almost total loss of house, property and personal goods. In the aftermath of Mitch, members worked together to rescue personal belongings, settle into a new area and begin constructing new homes. They also continued to meet on a weekly and at times more frequent basis. OCDIH and the Red Cross began working with these communities after the disaster in order to help them settle into shelters and initiate development projects. Although community organization was an integral component of all of these post-disaster assistance projects, external aid agencies did not have to emphasize the importance of collaborative endeavors because these families were already committed to such work. However, NGOs did help residents established new groups that could undertake new responsibilities. The Red Cross, for example, helped form water and health committees in the shelters that could manage a water pump and respond to basic medical concerns should they arise. OCDIH, on the other hand, encouraged resident to form a *patronato*—something they had not done before—and to organize work groups to begin building new concrete homes. Residents responded by forming both of these new groups based on the structure of their pre-existing peasant organization. OCDIH also encouraged females, the gender group that had been least organized in the past, to form a group to raise chickens and pigs for the community. The women established this organization just as easily as the other community groups had been formed.

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These community experiences have been uncharacteristic of the rest of Potrerillos. The surveys conducted in the area seventeen months after Mitch revealed that the majority of this municipality’s residents were not well organized nor willing to engage in cooperative endeavors. In general, the region’s organization had reverted to its pre-Mitch state. Each of the 370 residents surveyed in January and February 2000 were asked to describe how easy it was to work with other members of their community and to compare this to how easy it had been to do this before Mitch. Only 18% of respondents believed it was easier to work with neighbors in 2000 while over half believed it was the same or more difficult to do so than in the past. These responses collaborate the information gathered through qualitative methods and suggest that no long-term, social-organizational change occurred in Potrerillos as a result of the floods. The solidarity or cooperative behavior that arose here during the emergency period was brief and fleeting.

Survey participants also were asked whether they thought their community’s organization was active, moderate, weak or non-existent at the time surveys were being collected. The majority (65%) believed either that there was no organization in their community or that what little did exist was weak. Only 13% of respondents thought the organization there was active while another 10% believed it was moderate (See Table 7-1). When residents were asked to describe how their community’s organization had

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Surveyed Residents Described Community Organization Before Mitch</th>
<th>How Surveyed Residents Described Community Organization in 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Organization       13%</td>
<td>Active Organization       13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Organization    10%</td>
<td>Moderate Organization    10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Organization         32%</td>
<td>Weak Organization         32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Organization           33%</td>
<td>No Organization           32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t Know               11%</td>
<td>Didn’t Know               12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7-2  One-sample t test comparing perceptions of community organization in Potrerillos in 2000 with the pre-Mitch period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Intervals of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.165</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>1.18E-02</td>
<td>Lower: -.13, Upper: .15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey participants’ perceptions of how their community’s organization was before Mitch.

been before Mitch, almost all said that it had been the same as in 2000 (See Table 7-1).

The mean response for both time periods was almost identical. A one sample T-test determined that there was no significant difference in the mean responses regarding people’s perception of pre-Mitch and post-Mitch organization (See Table 7-2).

The survey instrument also was used to determine whether a greater number of local residents had begun participating in community organizations after Mitch. At a municipal level, it appears as if the advent of Mitch did not prompt such a change. Fifteen percent of those surveyed said they had been members of a group before Mitch while only 13% claimed to be members in 2000. A One Sample T-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean group membership in both time periods. Therefore, this data also lends no support to H1, the hypothesis that a major natural disaster causes disaster victims to become more organized.

Logistic regression was used to analyze further whether those most affected by Mitch were more likely to either join local groups or become politically active than those who had experienced little or no damage due to the storm. As the logit model reported in Table 7-3 reveals, a person’s disaster experience was found to have no statistically significant effect on post Mitch group membership in Potrerillos. Hence, this
Table 7-3 A logit analysis of how different variables are associated with post-Mitch group membership in Potrerillos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>3.141</td>
<td>0.521</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.508</td>
<td>0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.784</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>0.550</td>
<td>0.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor (3-6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Poor (7-10)</td>
<td>-0.883</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Off (11-13)</td>
<td>1.597</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Effect Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>-0.330</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>0.550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage +</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>-1.030</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>0.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>0.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>0.460</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>0.527</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>0.526</td>
<td>0.568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>-0.856</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td>0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.108</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 91.9 | N | 310
% Correctly Predicting Group Membership | 50.0 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.263
% Correctly Predicting No Group Member. | 97.8 | 2 Log Likelihood | 136.153

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Are you currently a member of a community group?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

Multivariate analysis also offers no support for H1. Nevertheless, the logit model in Table 7.5 did show that those residents who were most severely impacted by the storm were five times more likely to attend a *cabillo abierto* (town hall meeting) than those who had experienced no storm damage. Although this suggests that the disaster experience may have increased political participation in the area, there is insufficient
evidence to support this contention. Interviews and informal conversations with residents revealed that those who had been most affected by Mitch, particularly those who were still residing in temporary shelters during early 2000, were disillusioned with their political representatives and believed most of them did not care about their needs. These individuals expressed little interest in participating in politics and had done so during the months after Mitch only when they felt they needed to for survival. A crosstab and logit analysis of the survey data confirmed this impression by revealing that those who had suffered either significant or major damage due to Mitch were more ambivalent or opposed to participating in the 2001 elections than those who had been affected little or not at all by the storm (See Table 7-8). A separate logit analysis also showed that Mitch had no significant effect on a person’s likelihood to contact a government official after the disaster (See Table 7-4). Given this statistical data, one can not conclude that the experience of disaster alone led to either greater organization or political participation in this municipality.

The surveys gathered in Potrerillos did highlight that people with a history of organization tend to participate more in community groups than those with no such experience. The logit model in Table 7-3 indicates a series of independent variables that could help account for group membership. As can be seen, gender, education, poverty and past organizational experiences all had a statistically significant impact on group membership in 2000. A very poor male with some primary schooling and previous group experience had an 87% probability of being a group member after Mitch when holding all other variables in the logit model constant at zero while a very poor woman with no formal schooling or organizational experience only had a 4% probability of being a group
Table 7-4 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with government contact in Potrerillos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
<td>0.526</td>
<td>0.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Secondary Education</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td>0.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Effect Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>0.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>0.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major Damage</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>0.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>1.758</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.581</td>
<td>0.975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never Voted</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>0.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted Once in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>-0.192</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted Twice in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>-0.373</td>
<td>0.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted Thrice in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted in All of the Past 4 elections</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>0.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government official before Mitch</td>
<td>1.168</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo after Mitch</td>
<td>-0.549</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>0.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo before Mitch</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>0.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.003</td>
<td>1.108</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 89.3 | N | 298 |
% Correctly Predicting Contact | 36.6 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.195 |
% Correctly Predicting No Contact | 97.7 | 2 Log Likelihood | 173.918 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “From Mitch until now, have you contacted anyone in government to talk to them about a need, problem or concern?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

member when holding all other variables constant at zero. Out of all of the statistically significant independent variables in the model, past group experiences had the strongest predictive power over the likelihood of being organized. People who had been members
of a group before Mitch were twenty three times more likely to be involved in a local organization in 2000 than people with no such experience.

The survey data collected in Potrerillos further revealed that there is a strong association between organization and political participation, as the literature on civil society has persistently argued. Surveys participants were asked whether they had contacted a government official after Mitch in order to discuss a problem, need or worry. Logistic regression was then used to determine whether any of several possible variables had a positive effect on people’s responses to this question. The logit model reported in Table 8.4 shows that the only variables that had a statistically significant effect on this type of political activity was whether someone was a member of a group and whether they had initiated a similar form of government contact in the past (See Table 7-4). Group members were nearly six times more likely to contact a government official than those who did not belong to any organizations while those who had engaged in this type of political activity in the past were three times more likely to do the same after Mitch than someone who had no such experience. In other words, being organized increased one’s chances of contacting a government official more than having had comparable past experiences in political participation.

Belonging to a group was also a statistically significant predictor of post-Mitch cabildo attendance (See Table 7-5). Residents who were involved in a community group were nearly five times more likely to attend a cabildo than those who did not participate in any local organizations. Unlike the case of government contact, having had similar experiences in this form of political participation in the past was a more powerful predictor of post-Mitch cabildo attendance than solely being a member of a group.
Table 7-5 A logit equation analyzing how Different variables are associated with cabildo attendance in Potrerillos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.580</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>-0.160</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>-0.948</td>
<td>0.443</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>-0.458</td>
<td>0.543</td>
<td>0.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor (3-6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Poor (7-10)</td>
<td>0.419</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Off (11-13)</td>
<td>-0.297</td>
<td>0.671</td>
<td>0.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>0.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>-0.399</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td>0.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Effect Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-0.824</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage +</td>
<td>0.955</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>1.571</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0.409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.331</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>0.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>-0.493</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>0.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td>4.346</td>
<td>0.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>2.305</td>
<td>4.271</td>
<td>0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrice in Past 4 elections</td>
<td>-6.708</td>
<td>16.969</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In All of the Past 4 elections</td>
<td>2.416</td>
<td>4.273</td>
<td>0.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted gov’t official after Mitch</td>
<td>-0.740</td>
<td>0.668</td>
<td>0.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted gov’t official before Mitch</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo before Mitch</td>
<td>3.316</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-6.952</td>
<td>4.359</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 89.3 | N | 298 |
% Correctly Predicting Cabildo Attend. | 55.3 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.293 |
% Correctly Predicting No Cabildo Attend | 95.6 | 2 Log Likelihood | 156.453 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Have you attended a cabildo abierto since Mitch?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.
People who had attended at least one cabildo abierto before Mitch were 28 times more likely to do so again after the storm than those with no such experience. But, participation in a local group made it more likely that someone would participate in these types of meetings.

Interestingly, many residents recognize the political implications of being organized. One individual said he knew that “Solo el que esta organizado puede hablar. Solo al que esta organizado se le oye. Como no estamos organizados, el gobierno no nos responde.” Many others expressed similar views. Given this realization, why are residents not organized better? Some explain that people here are too busy and do not have time to join community groups. During their spare time, they prefer to focus only on issues of personal concern. Maquiladora workers, for example, often work ten or twelve hour shifts, six days a week. When they have time off, they usually tend to household matters. Similarly, sugar cane laborers work seven days a week from dusk until dawn during harvest time. The labor intensity of cane cutting makes them just want to rest when at home. But not everyone in Potrerillos works in such time consuming jobs. Other residents could be more active in their communities but are not. Some believe that this is because people here are apathetic and do not care to participate in anything. Others believe that party politics is what has weakened the social cohesion of the area. “La cosa partidiaria es lo que arruina las organizaciones,” explained one resident. Whatever the explanation, the fact is that few people in Potrerillos were well organized before Mitch, and they remained this way a year and a half after this event.

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9 Interview with Alfonso Rodríguez, resident of Potrerillos, January 25, 2000.

10 Interview with Bessy de Arellana, resident and active member of the Nationalist Party in Potrerillos, March 29, 2000.
The literature on civil society suggests that given the weak organization of Potrerillos, citizen political participation there should have been and continue to be minimal as well. In order to determine whether this suspicion is correct, survey participants were asked whether they had 1) attended a *cabildo abierto* both before and after Mitch, 2) contacted a government official both before and after the disaster, and 3) voted in the last four elections and intended to do so again in the future. Survey results revealed that the residents of the area participate only minimally in politics. Less than one fifth of the Potrerillos sample said that they had attended a *cabildo abierto* both before and after the storm. A One Sample T-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean respondents who attended these events in both time periods. There also was no significant increase in the level of contact between residents in Potrerillos and their political representatives after the storm. Eleven percent of those interviewed said they had contacted a government official at least once before Mitch and another 11% admitted having done so again afterward. A One Sample T-test showed that there was no significant difference between the responses for both time periods. This information supports what the civil society literature had led us to suspect: that there would be no significant change in the political participation of communities who had not experienced organizational changes after Mitch.

Part of the reason why citizens maintain such little contact with their local, political representatives is because of the actions and at times inaction of their municipal government. The first public meetings sponsored by local political authorities were in 1979. Mayors announced these events via loud speakers on cars which drove around town. Yet these meetings were infrequent and generally held in order to inform the
public of a particular event, not to dialog with residents. The 1990 Law of Municipalities tried to increase and improve this form of public, state-society communication by stipulating that each municipal government had to sponsor a minimum of five cabildos abiertos per year. But little was done in Potrerillos to abide by this law. The current mayor sponsored his first cabildo in April 1994 shortly after assuming office. Since then, he has held these events only sporadically, and the goal of five per year has not been met. Many of the so-called cabildos that are sponsored take place in a single community. Residents claim that the municipal-level, cabildos abiertos that have been held in recent years have not been announced publicly nor been open to all citizens. The mayor invites those whom he wishes to attend; most of these individuals are considered to be community leaders by virtue of the fact that they belong to or lead a civil society group. This partly explains why being a member of a group is such an important predictor of cabildo attendance in Potrerillos. But belonging to a particular group does not ensure that one will attend a cabildo. Leaders of patronatos who are not aligned with the mayor, for example, often are not informed of nor invited to these reunions. The few people who attend these meetings are selected by the mayor and tend to be loyal to him. This largely accounts for why pre-Mitch cabildo attendance was

11 Interview with Francisco Meléndez, mayor of Potrerillos (1984-85), April 1, 2000.
12 Interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, March 28, 2000.
13 Ibid.
14 Interview with Hector Guardado, Mayor of Potrerillos (1994-2001), April 1, 2000.
15 Interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, March 28, 2000.
16 Interview with Elsa Calix, President of the Patronato of Campo Garroba, Potrerillos, January 19, 2000.
Table 7-6 How residents from Potrerillos have participated in *cabildos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Before Mitch</th>
<th>After Mitch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed an Opinion</td>
<td>65% of attendees</td>
<td>65% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed an Issue</td>
<td>33% of attendees</td>
<td>30% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Proposal</td>
<td>15% of attendees</td>
<td>14% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>17% of attendees</td>
<td>13% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Decision</td>
<td>11% of attendees</td>
<td>8% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented a Project</td>
<td>15% of attendees</td>
<td>6% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Listened</td>
<td>27% of attendees</td>
<td>29% of attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

found to be the strongest predictor for post Mitch *cabildo* attendance in the logit model reported in Table 7-5. Not surprisingly, the people who attend *cabildos abiertos* typically do not question the mayor’s actions nor propose alternatives to them.\(^\text{17}\)

*Cabildos* follow an agenda set by the mayor and tend to be informative in content. Surveys gathered in the area revealed that over a quarter of those individuals who have participated in such forums either before or after Mitch have only gone to listen to what was being said. Although a majority of attendants have expressed some opinion, less than a fifth of them have either made a proposal or had the opportunity to participate in a decision-making process, be it either through voting or some other means (See Table 7-6) Attendees generally do not participate in these meetings nor discuss issues of concern to them either because they feel they can not alter the meeting’s agenda, have not learned how to participate more actively in such events or feel a clientelist loyalty to the mayor which precludes them challenging him in public.\(^\text{18}\)

The 1990 Law of Municipalities stipulates that each local government should have a *Comité de Desarrollo Municipal* (CODEM)—a counseling and supervisory body

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\(^\text{17}\) Interview with Dr. Eugenio Diaz, Doctor of the Health Center in Potrerillos, January 2000.

\(^\text{18}\) Interview with Jorge Alberto Espinoza, President of the Patronato of Barrio Cabanas, Potrerillos, February 1, 2000 and interview with Manuel Mayorca, President of the Patronato of Barrio Calejas-Maradiaga, April 1, 2000.
composed of representatives from civil society groups. CODEMs were designed to increase civil society’s participation in local government decision-making. Unfortunately, this also has not been a good means through which citizens in Potrerillos can communicate with their political representatives. The first CODEM in this municipality was established a few months before Mitch in response to the demands of a group known as *El Grupo Gestor* which was composed of representatives from twenty three communities.19 This group had been formed due to the suggestion and encouragement of OCDIH.20 The mayor agreed to form a CODEM by signing an *Acta de Concertación* (Act of Agreement) with the *Grupo Gestor*. He then selected members of this consultative group, assuring that representatives from both the *Grupo Gestor* and the three, strongest political parties in Potrerillos would compose it. Unfortunately, the CODEM was non-functional during its first two years of existence. The mayor rarely convoked them.21 The group met only once in 1998 for the purposes of its inauguration. The CODEM was slightly reactivated again after Mitch. Its members united with the municipality to carry out disaster relief activities and met formally in February and April of 1999.22 But the group initiated no projects nor was well informed of the municipal government’s activities. Some people believe that the CODEM’s weakness is due to the members who compose. One municipal government official said CODEM members, “no

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19 Interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, February 1, 2000.

20 Interview with Vicente Villanueva, member of Potrerillos’ CODEM, March 28, 2000.

21 The Law of Municipalities states that as president of the CODEM, the mayor convokes this group’s meetings.

22 Interview with Vicente Villanueva, member of Potrerillos’ CODEM, March 28, 2000.
No demandan nada."²³ The mayor acknowledged that this consultative body, "No nos ha funcionado muy bien."²⁴ On April 1, 2000 he announced his intent to form a new CODEM with representatives of all the patronatos and civil society groups in the municipality. However, it seemed as if the announcement was being made partly in response to the research being conducted for this dissertation rather than due to a real commitment to incorporate greater citizen participation in local political decisions. It is unknown whether a new CODEM in fact has been instituted in Potrerillos since then.

As was previously mentioned, some citizens of Potrerillos also tried to become politically active and increase people’s communication with the municipal government through the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos. The group informed residents via radio programs of the emergency assistance being received in the municipality after Mitch, the problems that citizens were encountering during the post disaster period and how their local government was responding to these.²⁵ Unfortunately, this group found it difficult to dialog with their local political representatives. The Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos tried to collaborate with their mayor by inviting him to meetings and asking him to officially swear in their members.²⁶ But he refused believing that the group was

²³ "[They] don’t have any consciousness. They don’t demand anything.” Interview with Miguel Sabala, Coordinator of Potrerillos’ Municipal Program on Community Development, February 1, 2000.

²⁴ "It hasn’t worked very well.” Interview with Hector Guardado, Mayor of Potrerillos (1994-2001), April 1, 2000.

²⁵ Interview with Transito Bautista, a school teacher in Potrerillos, January 30, 2000.

²⁶ Interview with José Octavio López, President of the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos, March 28, 2000.
led by his political opponents and was trying to delegitimize him.\textsuperscript{27} The group, however, was composed of members of various parties, including his own. Feeling that they would not be heard by their own mayor, the members of the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos traveled to the capital on four separate occasions to solicit help from various national government offices. No one replied to their petitions. As a result of the political inattention it received, the group began to weaken until it ceased functioning altogether.

The only form of political participation that residents from Potrerillos have undertaken consistently through time and in large numbers is voting. Eighty six percent of those consulted had exercised their suffrage in at least one of the last four elections. The majority of these had voted all four times. Those who had participated in only one or two elections in the past generally had done so because they were too young to have voted more frequently. In fact, age was the only independent variable that was significantly correlated with past voting, \((r = 0.245, \text{ approximate significance of } 0.000)\) in a simple bivariate analysis. Logistic regression confirmed that age as well as education had a statistically significant effect on past voting (See Table 7-7). Younger and less educated citizens were generally less likely to vote than older and more educated ones. Interestingly, a person’s interest in politics had no statistically significant effect on past voting patterns. In other words, most of the Potrerillos sample had voted in the past despite the fact that 65\% of them had admitted having no interest in politics and one fifth claimed to receive no news on this issue. In light of this information, the high percentage of voter turn out seemed surprising. When residents were asked through informal conversation why they vote, an overwhelming number responded, “because it is my

\textsuperscript{27} Interview with Hector Guardado, Mayor of Potrerillos (1994-2001), April 1, 2000.
Table 7-7 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with past voting in Potrerillos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>0.423</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural/Urban</strong></td>
<td>-0.494</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>0.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education + No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Politics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>-0.384</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.234</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>0.685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>1.012</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-0.463</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 86.4 | N | 298
% Correctly Predicting Past Voting | 100.0 | Cox & Snell $R^2$ | 0.095
% Correctly Predicting No Past Voting | 4.3 | 2 Log Likelihood | 237.311

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “In how many of the last four elections have you voted?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

duty.” This qualitative information suggests that citizens here do not vote because they really care about political issues. They do so because they feel they must. This sense of duty is instilled in residents through time by families and neighbors and through educational institutions. This partly explains why older and more educated individuals have voted more frequently than others.

The percentage of people refusing to vote in the future did not rise in the aftermath of Mitch, as may have been expected given resident’s stated disillusionment with their elected officials. Only 14% of the Potrerillos sample said they would not vote in the 2001 election. This is the same percentage of people who had not voted in the past. However, a notable percentage of those surveyed (27%) did express ambivalence regarding participating in future elections. The logit model in Table 7-8 revealed that three independent variables had a statistically significant effect on respondents’
Table 7.8 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with a desire to vote in the future in Potrerillos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.917</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>0.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.307</td>
<td>0.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Effect Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>0.313</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>0.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage +</td>
<td>-1.063</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>-0.891</td>
<td>0.591</td>
<td>0.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>0.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted in the Past</td>
<td>1.743</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government official after Mitch</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>0.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government official before Mitch</td>
<td>-0.317</td>
<td>0.529</td>
<td>0.550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo after Mitch</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>0.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo before Mitch</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.474</td>
<td>0.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>0.696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicted Overall</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting Future Vote</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell R²</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting No Future Vote</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>316.452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Do you plan to vote in the next election?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

willingness to vote in 2001: past voting experience, the rural/urban distribution of residents and the degree to which they had been affected by Mitch. Residents who had voted in the past were six times more likely to want to participate in future elections than those with no such political experience, and urbanites were two times less likely to want to vote than rural dwellers. A person’s experience with Mitch was also a strong predictor
of future voting commitment. A crosstab analysis revealed that over a third of those residents who had experienced significant or major storm damage were dubious as to whether they would vote again in the future while only 15% of the people who experienced minor damage and a quarter of those who were not affected by Mitch expressed the same ambivalence. The logit model reported in Table 8.8 confirmed the statistical significance of the relationship between Mitch Effect and future voting commitment. People who had suffered major storm damage were approximately three times less likely to want to participate in future elections than those who had not been affected by Mitch.

The case of Potrerillos sought to test whether the advent of a natural disaster alone would prompt 1) citizens to become more organized and politically active, 2) the municipal government to become more responsive to citizen demands and 3) a change in sub-national governance. The previous discussion has shown that residents from this municipality did unite and work together after the disaster, but primarily during the emergency period. Once the crisis had subsided, people reverted to their pre-disaster state of social atomization. Seventeen months after Mitch, few of the residents surveyed said they were members of a group and most believed their community’s organization was weak or non-existent, just as it had been before the storm. Political participation also has been frail in both time periods. Less than a fifth of those sampled had ever participated in a cabildo abierto or contacted a government official. They few politically-oriented, grassroots organizations that were established here after Mitch ceased functioning soon after their creation. Although most residents do vote, they do not do so because they care about politics, but rather because they feel they must. The
lack of citizen involvement in politics has permitted municipal authorities to continue monopolizing decision-making power as they have done historically. In other words, it has allowed the maintenance of an exclusionary and state-centric pattern of governance. The case of Potrerillos disproves H1. It suggests that a natural disaster alone does not lead to greater social organization, citizen political participation or governance change. Although these socio-political changes may arise after a disaster, they do so only when combined with other factors, as the succeeding analysis of Sabá will reveal.

**Sabá**

Sabá was one of the areas of the country most severely impacted by Mitch. The storm made landfall approximately 50 kilometers away from this municipality and dumped six feet of rain in the area in the span of only a week. The Aguán River and several of its tributaries overflowed the valley where Sabá is located to form a sea of water three meters high. Some of the homes in the area were entirely submerged under water. Most of the agricultural crops were lost due to the floods, and all the bridges and roads in the municipality were severely damaged or destroyed. In addition, 80% of the electrical system and 70% of the telephone system was damaged.

Individual households also experienced significant damage due to the storm. Representatives from 351 out of the almost 4000 houses in Sabá were surveyed as part of this dissertation research and asked whether their family had suffered any of the following as a result of Mitch:

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• house damage • total house loss
• crop damage • total crop loss
• some animal deaths • total animal loss

Responses to these questions were then used to develop a Mitch Affect Index. The survey data gathered revealed that 2% of the households here suffered a total loss of their possessions due to the storm, 47% suffered major damage, 10% experienced significant damage, 11% reported minor damage and the remaining 30% experienced no adverse effects. These statistics reveal that the residents of Sabá experienced greater personal damage as a result of Mitch than did those in Potrerillos (See Table 7-9). This is further evidenced by the disaster’s toll on human life in Sabá. Whereas no one from Potrerillos died or was injured as a result of the storm, a total of 252 residents from Sabá either lost their lives or were never found, 76 were injured and over 6000 had to be evacuated from their homes.

Table 7-9 Comparing Mitch-induced damage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Damage</th>
<th>Minor Damage</th>
<th>Significant Damage</th>
<th>Major Damage</th>
<th>Total Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potrerillos</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabá</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marcos</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolores M.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in Potrerillos, rural residents from Sabá suffered greater damage than did urban ones. A crosstab between the Mitch Effect Index and the urban/rural distribution of houses in this municipality revealed that over half of the urban households here suffered little or no damage while 75% of those in rural areas experienced either major damage or a total loss as a result of the storm. The chi-square of significance for this bivariate

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30 This chapter’s section on Potrerillos explains in detail how this Mitch Affect Index was developed.
31 Ibid
analysis was 61.708 with 4 degrees of freedom, allowing us to be over 99% that there is a significant association between the pre-Mitch location of households and the storm damage they suffered.

The adverse effects of Mitch were compounded in Sabá by the delayed receipt of external, emergency assistance. Unlike Potrerillos, this municipality did not receive such aid for nearly a month after the onslaught of the storm. During this time, the communities that compose this municipality were isolated from the rest of the country and, in some cases, from each other and forced to confront the crisis on their own.

Residents reported that during this immediate post-disaster period there was a noticeable increase in solidarity. As a local pastor explained, “El pueblo se unió y después se organizó … en el desastre las comunidades se unieron como pueblo, como gente, como iglesia.” Those whose homes were only partially or not at all destroyed offered shelter to neighbors less fortunate than they. Residents scavenged for plantains, corn, beans and whatever other crops had not been destroyed by the floods and shared their food with others. In addition, many citizens began working together to evacuate families from precarious situations and transport them to one of the many, temporary shelters in the municipality.

Many of the residents of Sabá self-organized around previously existing, often defunct modes of organization during this emergency period. CEBs were among the first to unite and offer neighbors assistance. The Comité de Emergencia Municipal, a group

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32 “The people united during this period and then organized … in the disaster communities united as a people, as a church.” Interview with Eucebio Sandres, Pastor of the Menonite Church in Sabá, September 11, 2000.

33 Interview with Eucebio Sandres, Pastor of the Menonite Church in Sabá, September 11, 2000,
that rarely met or trained for disasters, instantly banded to evacuate people. Patronatos also were re-animated during this period. Those who had once been part of an agrarian reform group re-united and delegated emergency tasks among themselves in a manner reminiscent of past cooperative experiences. One priest explained that all the people that approached him in search of help during this period represented communities that had self-organized in one form or another.34

When outside food, health and shelter finally began to arrive, local churches were asked to manage this aid in order to ensure that its distribution would not be politicized. Since the Catholic Church was by far the largest and most influential church in the region, they were given the task of distributing most of this external assistance. However, all the religious institutions in the area participated in this process. They coordinated amongst themselves, drafted work plans and quickly formed committees to supervise and apportion the external aid being received. The job of channeling emergency assistance forced local churches, particularly the Catholic Church, to assume the same duties as other NGOs that began working in Sabá after Mitch. Due to the assumption of their temporary, non-religious role, churches will be categorized as an external aid agency for the purposes of this post-disaster analysis of Sabá.

Although their immediate concern was with meeting basic needs, Catholic Church leaders did not want to centralize and monopolize emergency assistance, but rather channel it through community-based groups. Church officials chose not to collaborate with patronatos because they feared most of these were politically-tainted. CEBs were also not viewed as a viable alternative because many of its members had become

associated with a minority political party, the Unión Democrática (UD) in the years preceding the disaster. Consequently, the Catholic Church decided to build upon the post-disaster, emergent groups in the area and encourage the formation of more formal, community structures that could help manage incoming assistance.

Catholic Church leaders held meetings in each community of Sabá in November and December of 1998 in order to encourage residents to form Comités de Emergencia Local (CODEL). Typically, these organizations are trained and organized by COPECO, the national government’s emergency management agency. However in Sabá, the Church helped create these groups based on nascent, forms of social organizations. As the pastor of the Catholic Church in Sabá explained, “Surgió la organización por si sola … por la emergencia y entonces La Iglesia la ha ido acompañando … con formación y capacitación.” Some communities composed of ex-coop members initially were hesitant to form CODELs. Residents were distrustful of formal organizations given their past experiences with cooperatives. Nevertheless, CODELs quickly proliferated in Sabá. By the beginning of 1999 a total of forty eight such groups had been established in the municipality, each with an average of fifteen to twenty members. In order to ensure gender equity, Church leaders asked that these groups to be composed of an equal number of males and females. Although many ex-coop members participated in


36 “The organization arose on its own … due to the emergency and then The Church has accompanied it … with formation and training.” Interview with Rev. Juventino Mendoza, Pastor of the Catholic Parish of Sabá, September 8, 2000.

37 Parroquia de Santa Rita de Cassia, “Plan de reconstrucción y desarrollo de los CODELs del municipio de Sabá,” (Parroquia de Santa Rita de Cassia: Sabá, septiembre 1999).

38 Interview with Albertina Aguilar, Coordinador of the Pastoral Social Program in Sabá, September 7, 2000.
CODELs, the majority of the people who joined these organizations had no previous group experience.

CODELs and the municipal government encouraged other residents to form work groups in order to clean and rebuild their community. 39 A church- administered, Food for Work program initiated in December 1998 provided the material incentive for such collaborative efforts. The result was a flurry of cooperative activity in the area. Between December 1998 and November 1999, a total of 1886 families—almost half of all those in Sabá—participated in the Food for Work program directed by the Catholic Church. 40 Hundreds more participated in similar programs run by other organizations. Together, neighbors cleaned streets and buildings as well as rebuilt water, sewage, and other such public service systems. Residents also were encouraged to work together in the housing projects that were initiated in 1999. Various external agencies agreed to offer disaster victims the materials for new homes on the condition that beneficiaries invest the labor to construct these structures. As a result, approximately eighteen new housing communities were established in the municipality, each by its own team of construction workers.

The Catholic Church took several steps to ensure that CODELs would manage emergency aid in a responsible manner. Members were asked to sign a social contract with the Catholic Church through which both parties agreed to manage aid democratically with transparency and citizen participation. This agreement was envisioned as something similar to the social contract that political theorists have


40 Parroquia Santa Rita de Cassia, “Proyectos Realizados por comunidad durante el programa de Alimentos por Trabajo, promedios mensuales,” unpublished document available with the author.
suggested should bind states and their societies. CODELs were structured in such a way so as to prevent the excessive concentration of power into one leader. The group was divided into six different committees. Each was charged with addressing issues related to health, sustainable agriculture, infrastructure, gender and legal justice. Instead of designating a president to lead the group, a coordinator, sub-coordinator and secretary were selected to synchronize the work of each committee. The Catholic Church also recruited co-gestores to accompany and support CODELs in their activities. A total of eight such individuals were selected from the young adult population of Sabá to assume these paid jobs. Each of them was assigned a handful of communities which they had to visit at least once a week. They offered CODEL and other community members training on issues such as family planning, disease prevention, agriculture, construction and group participation. The idea was not simply to form a local group that could manage aid, but to initiate an organizational process by which communities would later become agents of their own development.

Initially, CODELs maintained a tense relationship with both CEBs and patronatos, the two community-level organizations that had been most active in Sabá immediately before Mitch. CEBs resented that the Church had chosen to encourage the development of and work with a new organization instead of theirs. Some people felt as if CODELs had replaced CEBs as the favored Church group. Similarly, patronato members felt that

41 Interview with Rev. Pedro Marquetti, Director of the Diocese of Trujillo’s Pastoral Social, September 23, 2000.

42 Parroquia de Santa Rita de Cassia, “Plan de reconstrucción y desarrollo de los CODELs del municipio de Sabá,” (Parroquia de Santa Rita de Cassia: Sabá, septiembre 1999).

43 Interview with Albertina Aguilar, Coordinadora del Programa de Pastoral Social de Sabá, September 7, 2000.
CODELs were assuming tasks that they should be charged with undertaking. Neither they nor the municipal authorities agreed to recognize CODELs as representatives of their communities, claiming that the Law of Municipalities bestowed that recognition only on *patronatos*. The *co-gestores* and Church leaders helped resolve the conflicts between CODELs and *patronatos* by asking community members to elect which of these two groups they wanted to represent them before outside agencies. The Church then began working with whomever was chosen by offering them training and ensuring that they were a truly democratic, local body. Clergy members helped resolve the conflicts between CODELs and CEBs by speaking to members of both these groups and sponsoring a religious retreat for them on September 30-October 1, 2000 where they emphasized the need for them to understand and support one another in their respective tasks.

The *Comité de Emergencia Municipal* also became very active during the reconstruction period. Historically, this group had ceased working together soon after the initial shock of disasters had passed. However, after Mitch, they committed themselves to not falling into inactivity again. Members began meeting on a weekly basis in order to better prepare themselves for future emergencies. COPECO supported this initiative by giving group leaders training on emergency rescue missions—a training that was then passed on to the rest of the members in weekly meetings. The *Comité de Emergencia Municipal* has managed to remain active over two years after the disaster.

The civil society activism that arose in Sabá after Mitch experienced a noticeable decline once the Food for Work program was terminated in November 1999. Residents ceased working together on clean-up or public construction jobs and the CODELs fell
into inactivity. Until then the CODELs main job had been that of supervising and recording the labor-hours families were investing into the Food for Work program and distributing food to them accordingly. In the absence of a new task, these organizations were significantly weakened. The few community groups that remained active were those who engaged in the construction of new homes. Resident’s initial reaction to the Food for Work program’s termination suggests that Sabá could have easily fallen into a state of atomization and apathy after the emergency period had passed, just as occurred in Potrerillos. However, the intervention of various external organizations soon afterward prevented this from occurring.

Leaders of the Catholic Church were conscious of the changes in community activism that began to occur towards the end of 1999. Yet, they were convinced that “el pueblo quiere la organización.” They knew that if they did not continue to support and strengthen the still frail CODELs, these groups would disappear entirely. The Church did not view CODELs as merely an organization to facilitate the reconstruction process, but rather as “an opportunity for achieving true citizen participation in the public spheres of municipal and regional power.” Church leaders began training co-gestores on a series of socio-political issues towards the end of 1999 and asked them to impart what they were learning on the these community groups. Co-gestores taught CODELs about the benefits of organization, how to participate in new groups, how to diagnose their community’s needs, how to design strategies to address these, and how to petition

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external support. They also began speaking to residents about the Stockholm Declaration which international donor agencies had drafted in May 1999. *Co-gestores* discussed concepts such as decentralization, citizen participation, transparency—all of which had been listed as requirements for Honduras to receive reconstruction assistance—and asked citizens to consider the implications of these for them and their communities.

Some people believed that the methodology used by the Church to promote CODELs was similar to the one they employed to support cooperatives and other community-based organizations during the preceding three decades. ⁴⁶ What changed, they argued, was the socio-political context within which this work was being performed. Although the Church’s work may still be perceived as politically threatening by some local leaders, ⁴⁷ it is not viewed as communist or completely antagonistic to the process of liberal, democratic deepening in Honduras. Consequently, these groups are not being attacked or delegitimized, but are being allowed to flourish.

CODELs have became more united and organized during the course of 2000 as a result of the Catholic Church’s work. At the beginning of the year, all the CODELs in the area established a municipal-level structure known as the *Unión de Organizaciones Comunales del Municipio* (UNICOM). UNICOM sought to establish a permanent and constant dialog between the various community organizations in Sabá. The group was composed of representatives from every CODEL and *patronato* in the municipality and met on a monthly and often weekly basis. Although community representatives did not

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⁴⁷ This sentiment was expressed by mayors from Sabá, Sonaguera and Iriona in personal interviews held during the month of September 2000.
always attend UNICOM’s meetings, approximately thirty to forty people united regularly through this forum to discuss issues of importance to them and exchange their community’s experiences.

Despite the remarkable work that the Catholic Church did in promoting and training CODELs, these groups continue to be frail. The Church leadership recognized that CODELs were in danger of becoming dependent on them. Moreover, they believed that if they were to suddenly withdraw their support from these groups, they might disappear altogether. However, Church leaders recognized that a significant organizational process was under development. They believed that the Mitch-induced disaster provided a window of opportunity to reanimate community activism here. They feared that if this opportunity was not seized, organizational life in Sabá and the Aguán Valley, more generally, would never thrive again. As a result, Church leaders committed themselves to supporting and strengthening CODELs until March of 2002. They planned to gradually withdraw their support of these groups thereafter.48

Although the Catholic Church’s work with CODELs was the largest and most encompassing of all the municipal projects seeking to encourage community organization, they were not the only institution promoting this type of work in Sabá. Several NGOs and external aid agencies initiated programs in this municipality at the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000 which further encouraged communities to work together in order to achieve their own development. The Acción Social Menonita, for example, began working in the four most disaster-stricken communities of Sabá immediately after

Initially, they focused only on emergency projects and helped both the Catholic Church and CODELs administer the Food for Work Program. Beginning in January 2000, however, the Acción Social Menonita initiated three development projects in the communities where they had been working previously which were to be implemented in a two year period. One of the projects sought to organize groups of citizen and train them on sustainable agricultural methods. After receiving training on these issues, each group member was asked to teach what they had learned to three neighbors who were asked, in turn, to impart what they had learned to three others so as to achieve a multiplier effect. A rural credit bank also was initiated and a group of twenty people from each community was trained to manage it. The final project was explicitly dedicated to promoting community organization and political participation. The Acción Social Menonita helped establish popularly-elected patronatos which were represented by every organized group in their community including the CODELs. Residents were taught how to participate democratically in their patronatos, draft Community Development Plans and solicit outside agency support to implement local projects. At first, residents were hesitant to respond to these projects. All of these communities had had traumatizing experiences with corrupt, cooperative groups and were distrustful of organizations. But, as the projects developed people became more willing to participate in them and work with neighbors. These projects, so it seemed, were reminding residents of the benefits of organized groups. As an ex-coop member from one of these communities expressed, “No

49 Unless otherwise indicated, the information reported in this paragraph is derived from an interview with Adelinda Quintanillo, Coordinador of Acción Social Menonita in Sabá, September 30, 2000.
CARE also initiated several development projects in Sabá after Mitch. The organization had worked in one community here in 1997 where it had helped institute a latrine and water project as well as organized groups to manage these. The 1998 floods effectively destroyed this community’s projects. The groups that had been formed by CARE instantly united and repaired the potable water system and latrines in their community on their own. The extent of disaster in Sabá encouraged CARE to begin working in the area once again. Initially, they responded to the disaster by distributing food and sponsoring emergency projects. However, soon afterward, CARE initiated several development projects here. Water and latrinizations projects were sponsored in six rural communities while a latrinization project was started in an additional two. When CARE began working in these areas, there were no community organizations in existence. All cooperatives were defunct and patronatos were non-functional. CARE helped organize water and health committees to not only construct but also give long-term maintenance to the previously-mentioned projects. In addition, watershed management teams were formed in each community to help reforest and care for the land surrounding nearby rivers. At first, community members were mistrustful of these organizations given their unpleasant experience with agrarian reform groups in the past. But people soon responded to them. Former coop members showed more chispa or spunk when it came to undertaking community projects due to the previous training they had received and experience they possessed on how to work communally. This chispa

50 Interview with Antonio Durón, former member of the Cooperative Unión San Francisco, September 20, 2000.
soon spread to other members of the community who had had no previous group experience. When the projects ended in December 2000, beneficiaries had reestablished a strong social cohesion and community network. CARE, the municipal government and the Secretaría Nacional de Agua y Alcantarillado (SANAA) were supposed to offer follow-up courses to these communities in order to ensure that neither their projects nor their organization fail.51

Outside agencies also initiated programs in 2000 aimed at preventing future natural disasters and preparing residents to respond to these should they arise. The Corporación Hondureña de Desarrollo Forestal (COHDEFOR), the national forest management agency, began establishing groups in several key communities of Sabá to reforest and manage the watersheds of the Aguán and Monga Rivers.52 Twenty to thirty people from six different communities were organized into these new organizations. They were given seeds, training on forest management and general education classes on environmental protection. At the end of 2000 the Spanish Cooperation Agency initiated an additional four year, $10 million lempira project to further support COHDEFOR and local group efforts to manage the Rio Monga watershed.53

Several organizations also worked to create a well-organized, emergency response system in Sabá. The Panamerican Development Foundation initiated an eighteen month program called El Programa Municipal de Sistema de Alerta Temprano (PROMSAT) which sought to form Comités de Emergencia Local in seven, urban and rural

51 Interview with Evangelina Montoya, CARE field officer, September 29, 2000.

52 Interviews with various community members during September 2000.

53 Presentation given by Medardo Castillo, Coordinador of the Fondo Agícola de Savá in a cabildo abierto on September 30, 2000.
communities in Sabá.\textsuperscript{54} A U.S. Disaster Corp volunteer who was working with PROMSAT started promoting the organization of \textit{Comités de Emergencia Local} in April 2000.\textsuperscript{55} Three of the communities targeted by this program were fairly well organized at that time and had a functional \textit{patronato} and CODEL. Interestingly, some of the residents of these areas had been part of cooperatives in the past. Not surprisingly, \textit{Comités de Emergencia Local} were established here with relative ease. The remaining five communities were not well organized when PROMSAT was initiated. The community groups there had disappeared or fallen into inactivity by then. Residents from these areas were initially hesitant to participate in this program. Community meetings would be announced, for example, but no one would attend them. Within two months, however, \textit{Comités de Emergencia Local} had been established in five of the seven targeted communities and training courses were being given to members of these groups. A few months later a team of six facilitators began working with PROMSAT to organize the remaining communities, strengthen all seven \textit{Comités de Emergencia Local} and better train members to respond to disasters.\textsuperscript{56} The Italian International Cooperation Agency (COOPI) initiated another program at the end of 2000 aimed at forming and training \textit{Comités de Emergencia Local} in the remaining communities of Sabá and establishing a strong network of communication between them and the municipal level emergency

\textsuperscript{54} Interview with Luis Rivera, President of the \textit{Comités de Emergencia Municipal}, September 8, 2000.

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Tammy Nolan, U.S. Disaster Corp volunteer who worked with PROMSAT (March-August 2000), September 11, 2000.

\textsuperscript{56} Presentation given by Medardo Castillo, Coordinador of the Fondo Agícola de Savá in a \textit{cabildo abierto} on September 30, 2000.
committee. Together, these two programs promise to leave a well-structured emergency response system in place in this municipality.

The social organization of the area has been promoted further by a UNDP-sponsored agricultural project that was initiated in January 2000. The project sought to reactivate agricultural production and encourage communal farming projects in Sabá. During its first year of existence, it organized agricultural committees in fifteen rural communities. Representatives from each of these groups formed a municipal-level agricultural committee to supervise and coordinate the various farming projects being implemented. Group members were offered training courses on sustainable agricultural methods and allowed to borrow money at an interest of 1.5% per month (or 18% per year) from a base fund of 921,600 lempiras. The fund is managed by a group integrated by two representatives from the municipal-level agricultural committee, a UNDP representative, a technician and the mayor. The municipal agricultural committee is charged with supervising and auditing the work of this financial-management group. Initially, some rural residents were hesitant to join the farming groups in their communities, but as the group’s success became evident, interest in them spread. By September 2000 nearly 400 farmers had been organized into these farming groups. The project sought to organize at least 800 farmers more by the end of 2001. This means

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57 Interview with Luis Rivera, President of the Comités de Emergencia Municipal, September 8, 2000.

58 Presentation given by Medardo Castillo, Coordinador of the Fondo Agícola de Savá in a cabildo abierto on September 30, 2000.

59 Corporación Municipal de Savá, Fondo Agícola de Savá, (Sabá: Corporación Municipal de Savá, enero 2000).
that more local farmers were working together in these rural agricultural committees than
the amount who had joined cooperatives in the 1970’s and 1980’s.⁶⁰

The Coordinator of Popular Organizations from the Aguán (COPA or
Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Populares del Aguán) further promoted the process
of organizing for self-development. COPA was conceived in 1996 among former labor
union and patronato leaders in Sabá who had been part of APOPA but disappointed by
the latter group’s demise three years earlier. They were concerned about the reversal of
the agrarian reform program and increasing concentration of land in the region. They
decided to unite grass-roots organizations in the Aguán Valley once again in order to
confront these issues. During its first two years of existence, COPA focused on
organizing peasants and helping them gain access to land. It helped establish forty seven,
landless peasant groups, including eight from Sabá, who were then transferred and settled
into the underpopulated municipality of Iriona, Colón. Although COPA was conceived
in Sabá and represented some cooperatives, labor unions and teachers federations from
there, it sponsored no activities in this municipality before Mitch. In fact, the
organizations from Sabá who were represented in COPA participated little in this
organization before the disaster. Most of COPA’s work was based in the eastern part of
Colón and focused on landless peasant groups.⁶¹

Although COPA has been described as an offspring of APOPA, it differs in
important respects from this previous organization. COPA has not emerged in response
to the Catholic Church’s instigation, as did its predecessor. Rather, several former

⁶⁰ Ibid and interview with Medardo Castillo, Coordinador of the Fondo Agícola de Savá, September 13,2000.
⁶¹ Interview with Rolando Canizales, President of COPA, September 23, 2000.
members of APOPA reunited in order to facilitate their regional coordination. Although COPA does maintain some contact with Catholic Church leaders, the relationship between the two is horizontal. COPA is not seen as the organizational child of the Church which must be led and guided, but rather as an independent group still in the process of growth. The fact that COPA has been reconstructed from the ashes of APOPA is both beneficial and promising. As the group’s president explained, “Hay mas experiencia, mas critica de la misma organizacion.” Since members are conscious of APOPA’s flaws, they take preemptive steps to prevent these from arising. The group, for example, has purposefully tried to avoid becoming dependent on external financial sources for its activities. All of its members are volunteers and mobilize using their own resources. This suggests that the group may be more sustainable than APOPA who collapsed after the Church withdrew its financial support.

COPA has become more organized and active in the aftermath of Mitch and has developed a remarkable capacity for political mobilization. On October 12, 1999, for example, 9000 of COPA’s members joined several peasant, indigenous and labor groups in Tegucigalpa to protest the reforms to article 107 of the constitution that Congress was then considering. The following year several thousand group members staged a public march in Tocoa demanding that the cooperatives in the region be given assistance to confront the low market price for African palm oil and other problems that were leading to their bankruptcy. COPA’s activities have not been limited to mere protest, however.

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63 Interview with Rolando Canizales, President of COPA, September 23, 2000.

64 Ibid
The group has been proactive in proposing solutions to its members’ problems and has tried to negotiate these with government officials. It also has continued to promote and strengthen community-based organizations in the Aguán. This later aspect of COPA’s work received a major boost in the late Summer of 2000 with a $1 million grant from CODA International, an NGO based in the United Kingdom. These funds were used to train thirty *capacitadores* or technicians in five municipalities (Sabá will have six *capacitadores*). Each of these will be charged with teaching grass-roots groups about their political rights, how to define and articulate their development priorities, and how to negotiate the attainment of these with political representatives.65

Although all of these new groups suggested that the level of organization in Sabá had increased after the disaster and advent of aid, surveys were administered to a representative sample of the households in the region in order to verify this observance. The 351 people who were surveyed in Sabá perceived that their community had become more cooperative and organized in the aftermath of Mitch than it had been before the storm. Study participants were asked how easy it was to work with other members of their community in September 2000 compared to how it had been before Mitch. A minority of the sample—14%—believed that working with others was more difficult. Forty percent thought it was the same, and 33% believed it was easier. In other words, Sabá had nearly twice the percentage of respondents as did Potrerillos who believed that working with neighbors remained easier over a year and a half after Mitch than during the period before the storm.

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65 For a report of CODA International’s project in Honduras see http://www.cit.org.uk/grants.htm#Honduras.
Survey participants also were asked to explain how strong they thought their community’s organization had been both before and after Mitch. As Table 7-10 reveals, sampled residents indicated that the organization in their area had improved after the disaster. Nearly half of the respondents believed their municipality had had a weak or no organization before the storm, but only 37% described Sabá in the same way in September 2000. Moreover, 17% of those surveyed believed their community’s organization was active in 2000 whereas only 7% described Sabá in the same way before Mitch. A One Sample T-Test showed that there was a significant though slight difference in how residents perceived their area’s organization during both time periods (See Table 7-11). Evidence of a renewed and sustained organizational activity in Sabá

Table 7-10 Perceptions of community organization before and after Mitch in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Surveyed Residents Described Community Organization Before Mitch</th>
<th>How Surveyed Residents Described Community Organization in 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Organization           7%</td>
<td>Active Organization           17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Organization      26%</td>
<td>Moderate Organization      27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Organization            43%</td>
<td>Weak Organization            35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Organization               4%</td>
<td>No Organization               2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t Know                   20%</td>
<td>Didn’t Know                   20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

September 2000. Moreover, 17% of those surveyed believed their community’s organization was active in 2000 whereas only 7% described Sabá in the same way before Mitch. A One Sample T-Test showed that there was a significant though slight difference in how residents perceived their area’s organization during both time periods (See Table 7-11). Evidence of a renewed and sustained organizational activity in Sabá

Table 7-11 One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch perceptions of community organization in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Community Organization in 2000 (Sabá)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Community Organization in 2000 (Sabá)</td>
<td>3.531</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.10 Lower, 0.34 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey participants’ perceptions of how their community’s organization was before Mitch.
Table 7-12 One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch group membership in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Test Value = 0.13*)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership in 2000 (Sabá)</td>
<td>-3.171</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.11 Lower -0.03 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean survey response to whether people had been members of a community group before Mitch.

also was manifested by the increased number of residents who joined community groups after Mitch. Only 13% of the people surveyed said they had belonged to a local group before the storm, but 20% admitted being members of an organization in September 2000. A One Sample T-Test showed that there was a slight but statistically significant difference in the mean responses to both of these questions (See Table 7-12). The organizations that citizens most belonged to were CODELs, *patronatos*, labor unions and peasant agricultural groups. However, respondents cited membership in a variety of additional organizations as well. Unlike the case of Potrerillos, all of the community groups mentioned through the surveys were active when field research was being conducted in Sabá. Therefore, respondents were not merely claiming to belong to an organization that rarely met, as may have been the case for some group members in Potrerillos. They belonged to local organizations that undertook regular and at times even weekly activities. Although it can not be argued that Sabá had become a strongly organized municipality by the end of 2000, this survey data together with the qualitative accounts of new groups described previously indicate that the level of organization here improved after Mitch and did not dissipate once the emergency period had passed.
The information just reported could be used to support two of this study’s hypothesis: that either Mitch or the arrival of external aid organizations contributed to an increase in organization (i.e., H₁ and H₂, respectively). It is also possible that not one but both of these independent variables were causing the observed changes in Sabá. In order to better determine whether the experience of disaster had encouraged residents here to become more socially active, the association between group membership and the Mitch Effect Index was measured through a simple bivariate analysis. This revealed that there was a statistically significant correlation between these two variables (\(\gamma = 0.236\) with a 0.000 significance). The Mitch Effect Index then was analyzed jointly with other variables in a multivariate analysis. The logit model reported in Table 7-13 revealed that having experienced severe storm damage had a positive effect on group membership. A person who suffered major or total loss as a result of Mitch was twice as likely to participate in a community group than someone who had not been affected by this storm. This information supports H₁, the hypothesis that a disaster experience encourages victims to become more organized.

It is probable that the active presence of external aid agencies during the two years after Mitch also contributed to a rise in organization here. As was explained earlier, many of the local groups that had been formed during the emergency phase began to fall into inactivity and disappear once the Food for Work Program ended in Sabá at the end of 1999. Had external agencies not intervened at this point to encourage residents to continue working together, the post-disaster collaborative spirit that arose here may have disappeared entirely in much the same way it did in Potrerillos. Unfortunately, it is difficult to statistically measure the impact of NGO activities on post-Mitch organization.
By September 2000 when surveys were being collected in Sabá, nearly every community in this municipality was receiving some type of support from at least one external aid agency. Consequently, when the presence of NGOs in a community is included in a logit model, it appears to have no statistically significant effect on post Mitch group membership. Nevertheless, simple frequencies do reveal that 43% of survey participants who were organized in 2000 belonged to a group that had received support from an outside aid agency. In some cases these agencies helped create new groups in a community while in others they merely encouraged the continuation and formalization of organizational processes that had arisen spontaneously in the immediate aftermath of disaster. Although the continual support offered by foreign aid agencies partly explains why the citizens in Sabá became more active after the storm, it can not replace the experience of disaster as an explanatory variable for post Mitch organization. The work that aid agencies performed in Sabá arose in direct response to the region’s experience with disaster. These organizations targeted those communities and families that had suffered the most significant storm damage so that they could rebuild their lives and reduce their vulnerability to future disasters. Had Mitch never afflicted Sabá, it is unlikely that this municipality would have received the amount of external support it did in 1999 and 2000. Therefore, it seems most probable that the confluence of both a disaster experience and the intervention of external aid organizations helps account for the recent increase and strengthening of organizational activity in Sabá.

Although these two independent variables may have positively affected the organization of this municipality, they did not in and of themselves determine who joined a group during the post-Mitch period. While 61% of all the people claiming to belong to
a group in 2000 had experienced major or total loss as a result of Mitch, for example, only 26% of those who encountered this degree of destruction were members of a group. Had the experience of disaster been the main determinant of organization, almost all surveyed residents who were affected severely by the storm would have belonged to a group in 2000. Similarly, had the presence of external aid agencies been the main agent responsible for the rise in organization, every community that was receiving assistance from them should have had a majority of its residents participating in local groups. Such was not the case. Although the disaster experience served as an initial catalyst for organization and cooperation and external agencies strengthened this process further through their various projects, other factors help account for who actually joined groups in Sabá during the aftermath of Mitch.

The logit model in Table 7-13 analyzes how several independent variables affected someone’s likelihood of being organized in Sabá during 2000. As can be seen, a person’s experience with disaster, education, degree of urbanization and past organizational experiences had a statistically significant effect on their likelihood of belonging to a group after Mitch. The logit model allows us to determine that a male, rural resident with some organizational experience but no formal schooling who was heavily impacted by Mitch (a very likely scenario) had an 86% probability of belonging to a community group in 2000 while a male, urban resident with no organizational experience and some secondary schooling who suffered major storm damage (also a likely scenario) only had a 29% probability of being a group member. Had these fictitious individuals not been affected by Mitch, their probability of being involved in a local organization would have dropped to 75% and 16% respectively. The logit model reveals that although a person’s
Table 7-13 A logit model showing how different variables are associated with post-Mitch group membership in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>2.832</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td>0.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.960</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>0.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>1.060</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitch Effect Index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.455</td>
<td>0.513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-1.132</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage +</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-2.877</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall: 85.8  % Correctly Predicting Group Membership: 45.3  % Correctly Predicting No Group Member: 96.1

Cox & Snell R²: 0.230  2 Log Likelihood: 236.115

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Are you currently a member of a community group?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

An encounter with disaster clearly affected their odds of belonging to a group, their past experiences with organizations was a much stronger predictor of this outcome. Someone who was severely impacted by Mitch was twice as likely to join a group than someone who had suffered no storm damage. But someone who had been involved in a community group before the disaster was seventeen times more likely to continue to engage in this type of activity than someone with no such experience. This statistic collaborates the qualitative data collected in the area. As one NGO worker explained, “the people [in Sabá] who tend to get involved always get involved.”

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Although the political effects of Sabá’s renewed organizational activity are only slowly being revealed, there are several indicators to suggest that residents have started to become more politically active in the two years after Mitch than they were previously. Most of the people surveyed in September 2000 showed a strong commitment to voting. Eighty eight percent of them had voted at least once in the last four elections and over half had done so in all of these events. Although 16% of the Sabá sample had never voted in the past, only 4% said they would not participate in future elections. Resident’s contact with government officials also increased in the aftermath of Mitch. Only 7% of those surveyed had ever contacted a government official regarding a problem, need or concern before the disaster. Yet, in the two years after Mitch 15% of them had initiated this type of action. A One Sample T-Test confirmed that there was a statistically significant change in the mean level of government contact before and after Mitch (See Table 7-14). A notable percentage of residents had also become active in public forms of political participation. Approximately 12% of those surveyed had participated in a march or protest at some time before Mitch. For most of these individuals, several years had passed since they had last engaged in this type of activity. Yet over 8% had joined a public protest again in just the two years since the disaster.

Table 7-14 One-sample t test comparing post-Mitch levels of government contact in Sabá with the pre-Mitch period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Value = 0.07*</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.231</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04 Lower .12 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The test value represents the mean of survey participants’ who contacted a government official before Mitch.
Table 7-15 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with participation in public marches in Sabá after Mitch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.579</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.378</td>
<td>0.662</td>
<td>0.568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-0.132</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>1.324</td>
<td>0.543</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Effect Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>1.586</td>
<td>6.875</td>
<td>0.818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-6.059</td>
<td>20.535</td>
<td>0.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage +</td>
<td>2.749</td>
<td>6.856</td>
<td>0.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>0.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-2.390</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Voted Before</td>
<td>-1.337</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government official before Mitch</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government official after Mitch</td>
<td>1.371</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a March before Mitch</td>
<td>1.428</td>
<td>0.588</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-6.141</td>
<td>6.972</td>
<td>0.378</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall: 94.0 N: 299
% Correctly Predicting Contact: 38.5 Cox & Snell R²: 0.173
% Correctly Predicting No Contact: 99.3 2 Log Likelihood: 119.767

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Have you participated in a public march or protest since Mitch?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

As in the case of Potrerillos, a citizen’s involvement in community groups was found to have a significant effect on his/her level of political activity in Sabá. Two thirds of those surveyed who had participated in a public march or protest were members of some type of community group in 2000. A bivariate analysis revealed that there was a
statistically significant relationship between post Mitch group membership and public marches ($V = 0.245$ at 0.000 significance level). However, when multivariate regression was used to analyze the effects of organization and a series of other independent variables on this political activity, group membership was found to be a weaker predictor of protest activity. As the logit model on Table 7-15 reveals, education, a person’s interest in politics and their past experiences with marches had the most statistically significant impact on their likelihood to engage in public protest during the two years after Mitch. Whether someone was or had been a member of a group continued to have a positive though not statistically significant effect on this dependent variable. However, when similar independent variables were included in another regression model to determine how they influenced whether a resident had ever engaged in public protest, the effects of organization became more evident. As the logit model on Table 7-16 reports, membership in a group was the strongest and most statistically significant predictor of public protest activities through time. Organized residents were three and a half times more likely to engage in these forms of political activities at some point in their lives than those who had never participated in a group. Education and government contact continued to have a positive effect on protest activities. The logit model on Table 7-16 allows us to determine that a male resident from Sabá with some secondary school education, organizational background and experience contacting government officials had a 61% probability of having participated in a public march or protest while a comparable male with no education, organizational experience or past government contact had only a 6% probability of doing the same.
Table 7-16 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with ever having participated in public marches in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>0.529</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural/Urban</strong></td>
<td>-0.853</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty Index</strong></td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>0.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Politics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.937</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>0.386</td>
<td>0.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever been a Member of a Group</strong></td>
<td>1.279</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voted in any of the last 4 elections</strong></td>
<td>-0.744</td>
<td>0.542</td>
<td>0.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever Contacted a Government official</strong></td>
<td>1.074</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-2.067</td>
<td>0.836</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 85.3 | N | 320 |
% Correctly Predicting Marches | 23.5 | Cox & Snell $R^2$ | 0.142 |
% Correctly Predicting No Marches | 97.0 | 2 Log Likelihood | 231.739 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Have you ever participated in a public march or protest?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

The survey data also revealed that there was a significant association between a person’s civic involvement and their likelihood of contacting political officials. Table 7-17 reports a logit model analyzing how a series of independent variables affected pre-Mitch government contact in this municipality. As can be seen, the only two factors that had a statistically significant effect on this dependent variable were past group membership and participation in public marches. People who were organized before the storm were four times more likely to contact their political officials than those who were not, and those who had participated in marches or protests were five times more likely to contact their political representatives than those who had avoided this type of public
Table 7-17 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with Pre Mitch government contact in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.580</td>
<td>0.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>-0.665</td>
<td>0.722</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>0.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>0.783</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>1.369</td>
<td>0.581</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.280</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>0.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Voted Before</td>
<td>7.200</td>
<td>24.495</td>
<td>0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a March before Mitch</td>
<td>1.602</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-11.388</td>
<td>24.516</td>
<td>0.642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 93.5 | N | 309  |
% Correctly Predicting Contact | 15.0 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.130 |
% Correctly Predicting No Contact | 99.0 | 2 Log Likelihood | 105.028 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Before Mitch, did you ever contact someone in the government to talk to them about a problem, need or concern?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

The relevance of organization for politics continued to be evident after Mitch. The logit model in Table 7.18 shows that a person’s participation in a community group was the strongest and most significant predictor of post Mitch government contact. Group members were about three and a half times more likely to contact a government official after the storm than non-group members. It is, therefore, not surprising that as the percentage of organized residents in Sabá increased, citizen direct engagement with political officials rose also. This data supports our hypothesis (H3) that a more organized citizenry will increase its involvement in politics and level of communication with the government.
Table 7-18 A logit equation analyzing how different variables are associated with post Mitch government contact in Sabá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
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<td>0.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitch Effect Index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Damage</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>0.492</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Damage</td>
<td>-0.675</td>
<td>0.659</td>
<td>0.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Damage</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>0.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member of a Group</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.288</td>
<td>0.460</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Member of a Group</strong></td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>0.492</td>
<td>0.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Politics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>-0.297</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.063</td>
<td>0.403</td>
<td>0.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>0.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever Voted Before</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>0.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contacted a government official before Mitch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.045</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participated in a March after Mitch</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participated in a March before Mitch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>0.973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-3.533</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall 86.3 N 299
% Correctly Predicting Contact 24.4 Cox & Snell R² 0.151
% Correctly Predicting No Contact 97.2 2 Log Likelihood 204.370

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Since Mitch, have you contacted anyone in the government to talk to them about a problem, need or concern?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

Qualitative data further revealed how citizens that became better organized after the storm were able to impact local politics. Before Mitch, no cabildo abierto had ever been staged in Sabá. But beginning in 2000, the teachers unions and recently formed CODELs began demanding that the municipal government abide by the 1990 Law of Municipalities and sponsor such an event. The mayor promised he would host a
cabildo but procrastinated doing so for months. Finally, the CODELs and teachers unions joined forces and threatened to take public action if such an event was not held before the end of October 2000. Local government authorities responded rapidly by hosting two public meetings. The first was held on September 24 of that year in Elexir, the largest rural community in Sabá. Some people saw this event as practice for the formal cabildo abierto held a week later on September 30. The cabildo was clearly an important event in Sabá’s history and was broadcast on local radio and television stations, interrupting all other regularly scheduled programs. A total of sixty five people attended this event. Almost all of them were leaders of community groups. Non group members overwhelmingly choose to listen to and watch the cabildo from home, leaving more active forms of participation in to organized citizens. During the cabildo municipal government authorities gave a report of the new projects that were being initiated in Sabá, how much revenue they had collected during the past two years and how these funds had been spent. This was the first time that municipal government transparency had been available. Participants were invited to make comments or pose questions about whatever issues they wished to discuss. However, they were not asked to vote or make decisions on any issue. Although more could have been done to incorporate citizen input into local political decision-making, this cabildo established a new form of dialog between residents and their local governments—one that would not have been available had organized groups in the community not demanded it.

The thirty five CODELs in the municipality also were active in opening other, new channels of communication between citizens and the local government after the disaster. During the later part of 1999 Catholic Church leaders and co-gestores in Sabá informed
local communities about the 1999 Stockholm Declaration and explained its meaning to them. Simultaneously, Church members began drafting a *Carta de Intenciones* (Letter of Intention) which sought to get local citizens and officials to abide by this international declaration. The *Carta de Intenciones* stated that the process of political decentralization would be incomplete if it excluded citizens from taking part in local, decision-making processes. In order to guarantee citizen participation in the formulation, execution and supervision of municipal plans and projects, the document declared that a *Comité de Desarrollo Municipal* (CODEM) and a social auditing commission should be formed. Members of the former were to be named by the municipal government, as stipulated by law, while those of the later were to be nominated and elected by civil society groups. The Letter of Intentions further stated that every community in the area was autonomous and had elected either *patronatos* or CODELs to be their representatives. Implicit in this statement was the notion that the municipal government could not control the composition or actions of these grassroots organizations. Once drafted, the *Carta de Intenciones* was presented to local community groups for explanation, suggestions and ratification. After having been approved by them, the letter was presented to the mayor of Sabá so that he could sign it in agreement. He refused. Both he and several regents opposed signing the letter because it would take power away from them and, they believed, allow residents to take over local government. After several months of unresponsiveness, the CODELs threatened to take over the municipal hall in protest if the document was not signed. The mayor, clearly worried by their threats, finally signed the *Carta de Intenciones* on November 6, 2000. This promised to create a more participatory, municipal-level governance: civil society groups will be allowed to design,
implement and manage public policies, projects and institutions together with municipal government authorities.

The renewed organizational fervor and political activism in Sabá and the Aguán Valley, more generally, did not go unheeded by national leaders who recognize, as one local resident explained, that “Cuando las bases dicen que el Aguán se va ha parar, la cupula tiembla.” During the month of September 2000 INTERFOROS approached COPA, the Diocese of Trujillo, UNICOMs, cooperatives and economic groups in the Aguán Valley proposing that they all unite to form a regional bloc of mass-based, civil society groups groups that could then be linked up to their own organization. This would help INTERFOROS counter criticisms that it had no grass-roots mandate while also help the various organizations in the area consolidate themselves and better channel their demands to the national government. On September 23, 2000 representatives of the various groups in the Aguán Valley formed a regional INTERFOROS through a highly democratic election process. One of the representatives from the UNICOM in Sabá was elected to form part of this group’s directive. The popular assembly that created this new, regional organization determined that they would undertake a highly political agenda which included securing people’s democratic access to basic services (i.e., health, education, etc), ensuring that the Stockholm Declaration was being followed, combating corruption and achieving electoral reform. In sum, these groups committed themselves to working more actively and jointly to transform Honduran politics. If successful, this new regional block will exemplify how a well organized base of citizens can influence not only local but also national level politics.

67 “When the bases say the Aguán will stand [in protest], the hierarchy trembles.” Interview with Nelson Rios, teacher and former INA official in Sabá, September 14, 2000.
As the preceding discussion has tried to show, the residents of Sabá were reanimated both politically and socially in the two years after Mitch. Three factors have contributed to these socio-political changes: the advent of disaster, the intervention of external aid agencies and both pre and post Mitch organizational experiences. The disaster was the initial catalyst for collaborative endeavors, forcing residents to work together in order to survive and restore local life to something approaching normalcy. However, people did not simply join work groups in random and unpredictable ways. They reverted to pre-existing often defunct patterns of organization in order to confront crisis. Past experiences with group work were a form of social capital that many residents had stored and from which they were able to draw as a way of responding to unforeseen, external shocks. Yet the collaborative environment induced by disaster and facilitated by past experiences do not appear to have been able to promote a long-term change in social behavior. Community groups began to weaken and disappear once the emergency period had passed. They were only reanimated again once they were incited to do so in late 1999 and 2000 by external aid agencies. Interestingly, all of these agencies reported that residents were initially hesitant to work together on longer-term development projects. It was only after they had invested some time convincing residents of the benefits of joint endeavors that some were willing to undertake such tasks. Still, it would be wrong to attribute most of the longer term change in social behavior here to aid agencies. After all, these organizations may never have initiated projects in Sabá, at least not simultaneously and to the magnitude that they did, had this municipality not been devastated by Mitch. Therefore, it appears that both Mitch and the advent of external aid
agencies helped improve organizational activity here after the storm. This supports the first two of our hypothesis (H1 and H2).

The case of Sabá also supports the third hypothesis that a more organized citizenry will become more politically active. As was previously discussed, a greater percentage of residents tried contacting government officials during the two years after the storm than they had previously. A notable percentage of citizens also participated in more public and confrontational forms of political action such as marches and protests—political activities that had almost ceased to be practiced here during the few years immediately preceding Mitch. Both the statistical and qualitative data reported previously reveals that the heightened level of political activism in Sabá is positively correlated with the improved level of organization here.

Lastly, the case of Sabá seems to support our fourth hypothesis, that a politically active citizenry promotes the existence of a participatory kind of governance. Some of the strongest and most active civil society groups in Sabá tried to establish newer channels of communication with their municipal government by calling for the creation of cabildos abiertos, CODEMs and social auditing committees. They argued that the 1992 Law of Municipalities and the 1999 Stockholm Declaration mandated the creation of such spaces for citizen participation. Though initially hesitant to comply, local government officials eventually succumbed to these popular demands. It hosted its first two cabildos abiertos in September 2000. Soon thereafter, the mayor also agreed to create a CODEM and social auditing commission in order to prevent local civil society groups from forcefully occupying the municipal palace in protest. All of these measures promised to initiate a new, more participatory pattern of governance in Sabá.
Dolores Merendón

Dolores Merendón did not experience a natural disaster as did Potrerillos and Sabá. However the heavy rains produced by Mitch did cause some minor damage in the area, particularly to those families who had cultivated crops in the steeply sloped mountainous terrain of this region. Representatives of 179 of the approximately 400 households in Dolores were surveyed as part of this dissertation research. Sixty two percent of respondents revealed that their household had not been affected by Mitch. A third reported having experienced minor damage such as some animal deaths, some crop loss or partial house damage and only 5% lost either all their crops, animals or home as a result of this storm. Due to the relatively mild storm damage experienced here, FHIS reported that this municipality was one of the ones in the country least affected by Mitch and, therefore, did not qualify for any emergency assistance.68

Despite having suffered relatively little due to this storm, several NGOs initiated development projects in Dolores Merendón in 1999 and 2000 in order to counter the extreme poverty of the region. All of these projects have required the active participation of residents in the decision-making and implementation process. In addition, some NGOs have worked closely with the municipal authorities in order to improve their manner of governing and strengthen their network of communication with local citizens. This new push for social and political change has had a moderate though notable improvement in local organization and governance in the past few years.

The Asociación de Organismos No Gubernamentales de Honduras (ASONOG or Association of Honduran Non-Governmental Organizations) began working in Dolores

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Merendón at the end of 1998. After doing an initial assessment of the community’s needs, ASONOG sponsored a building project in early 1999 by offering loans and technical support to the handful of households that had suffered major damage as a result of Mitch. In order to receive assistance, beneficiaries were required to work together to repair or rebuild houses. Although residents did so with ease, the working groups disintegrated as soon as the construction projects were completed. In the Summer of 2000 ASONOG began organizing Comités de Emergencia in order to train local inhabitants how to respond to future emergencies. Initially, some residents seemed uninterested in participating in these new groups. ASONOG’s representatives had to invest much time traveling to people’s houses and encouraging them to attend training sessions. This time investment eventually paid off and Comités de Emergencia were successfully trained and established in each of the municipality’s aldeas as well as in the urban heart of Dolores.69

ASONOG further encouraged residents from the villages of San Jeronimo and Las Toreras to organize Juntas de Agua in late 1999 and 2000 in order to build and manage a new potable water system in their respective villages. The process of organization was somewhat difficult for the inhabitants of Las Toreras. Although only about forty households occupied this aldea and a manageable group of less than thirty people was established to construct the water project, residents found it difficult to cooperate with one another. A series of personal conflicts and power struggles caused neighbors to periodically discontinue working on the project and refuse to collaborate together. ASONOG technicians had to intervene with several motivational chats in order to

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69 Interview with Jennifer Erazo, ASONOG technician in charge of training and organizing Comités de Emergencia in Ocotepeque, May 5, 2000
encourage residents to continue working together. Eventually, the water project here was completed, though three months behind schedule. The process of organization was easier in San Jeronimo despite the fact that this aldea is almost five times the size of Las Toreras. The mayor, an inhabitant of San Jeronimo, actively encouraged local residents to participate in the work groups. In order to ensure the greatest participation of people, neighbors implemented a rule that the households which did not contribute time to building this project would be charged a fee for receiving potable water while those who worked on the project would have free access to this resource. As a result of this economic incentive, there was a high level of participation, organization and self monitoring among neighbors and the project was completed within the scheduled time.⁷⁰

Towards the end of 2000 ASONOG initiated an integrated health project that further promised to rouse the organization and social activism of local residents. At the time, Dolores Merendón had one nurse, two nurse assistants and a doctor assigned to care for its entire population. In addition, the Ministry of Health had trained approximately thirty local residents to adopt voluntary health roles (e.g., midwives) in their community. Unfortunately, the medical personnel and health volunteers in Dolores Merendón rarely met nor cooperated together and both had received only scant training. ASONOG wanted to change this situation. Their integrated health project sought to improve the training of each volunteer and permanent health employee. They also wanted to organize these groups into several local and one municipal level Comité de Atención Integral de Salud (Integrated Health Service Committee) which could better monitor health conditions in the area and impart basic health courses to other residents in the

⁷⁰ Interview with Alexander Villeda, ASONOG technician, August 9, 2000 and interview with Efrain Deras, Coordinator of ASONOG’s activities in Ocotepeque, June 18, 2000
municipality. As a result of this on-going project, the level of preparation and organization among salaried and voluntary health personnel in Dolores has improved dramatically.

A second NGO known as DIA began working in Dolores Merendón in the Summer of 2000. The organization was subcontracted to implement a six year development project developed and financed by both the UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. The *Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible*, (FONADERS or National Fund for Sustainable Rural Development), as the project was named, sought to improve living conditions and reduce vulnerability in the eighty-one, poorest municipalities in Honduras. During initial months of work, the two-member DIA team held meetings with the residents of Dolores Merendón in order to determine their needs and compile a list of projects that could be implemented in the area. These gatherings encouraged residents to meet regularly, discuss their necessities and develop joint solutions to them. As with ASONOG, DIA required that beneficiaries become active participants in their own development by forming work groups to implement their self-identified projects. By the end of 2000, DIA-FONADERS had initiated three rural banks, a water project, a coffee processing association and a micro-enterprise in Dolores Merendón. The water project reanimated a *Junta de Agua* that had been formed years earlier in the urban heart of Dolores and which had fallen into a state of inactivity. The micro-enterprise united a group of approximately a dozen men to build metallic grain silos for sale in their municipality. And each rural credit bank enabled citizens to receive training on how to save money, borrow and repay credit and increase the community’s

financial holdings. All of these initiatives have reemphasized the importance of cooperation and strengthened the nascent forms of social organization that ASONOG had been nurturing for the previous year.

Surveys were conducted in Dolores Merendón in April 2000 in order to determine whether the NGOs that were working in the area were prompting any significant organizational or political change in the municipality. At the time DIA was still in the consultative stage of its work while ASONOG had been working in the area for several months. A sample of 179 out of the approximately 1500 adult residents in the area was selected. Each study participant was asked to describe how well organized their community was then compared to how it had been before Mitch.\(^\text{72}\) Approximately a third of respondents said that their community’s organization had been weak or non-existent before Mitch, another third believed it had been moderate while 17% thought it had been active. These individuals generally perceived a slight improvement in this situation between the pre-NGO period and April 2000 (See Table 7-19). Whereas only 42% of them thought their community was actively or moderately well organized before Mitch and the arrival of NGOs in the area, over 61% described their municipality in this way

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\(^\text{72}\) NGOs began working in the area at about the same time Mitch attacked Honduras. Since Mitch is a historical event that is clearly marked in the minds of all Hondurans, it was used as a landmark to get people to think about the period before and after the intervention of external aid agencies.
Table 7-20  One-sample t test comparing perceptions of community organization in Dolores Merendón in 2000 with the pre-Mitch period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.237</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.02 Lower .33 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey participants’ perceptions of how their community’s organization was before Mitch.

during 2000. A one sample T Test confirmed that there was a statistically significant difference between how people viewed the area’s organization during both time periods (See Table 7-20).

Although survey participants may have detected a greater or more active number of groups in their communities, this does not mean they thought residents worked well together. In order to determine the nature of collaborative endeavors in Dolores Merendón residents were asked to describe how easy it was to work with other members of their community in 2000. Over half believed it was easy while a third said it was difficult. Few, however, had detected a noticeable improvement in community relations between the pre and post NGO period. Only 14% of those surveyed thought cooperative work had become easier since 1998. One fifth thought working with others had become more difficult while 52% said it had remained the same as before.

Irrespective of people’s perception of the organizational health of their community, the surveys collected in Dolores revealed that residents had become more socially active after the intervention of NGOs in the area. Only 5% of the people consulted had been members of a community group before Mitch when the municipality received almost no attention from outside aid agencies. However, by April 2000 when ASONOG, DIA and
APS were still beginning their work there, the percentage of people engaged in group activities had increased to 10%. Two thirds of them were members of a group that had been created or sponsored by an NGO while the remaining one third belonged to traditional organizations such as a patronato or an Asociación de Padres de Familia. A one sample T Test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean level of group membership in both time periods (See Table 7-21). This information together with the previously reported data on organizations in Dolores Merendón lends some support for H2, the hypothesis that external aid agencies encourage target communities to become more organized.

Table 7-21 One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch group membership in Dolores Merendón

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership in Dolores Merendón in 2000</td>
<td>2.282</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>.01 Lower .10 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey response to whether people had been members of a community group before Mitch.

A statistical analysis of group membership in this municipality was undertaken in order to determine whether other factors aside from the work of NGOs could help account for the observed increase in the region’s organization. A crosstab analysis had revealed that men and people with some past group experience were more likely to belong to community groups. Only men, for example, had participated in local organizations during 2000, and all those individuals who had been active in their communities before the intervention of NGOs became involved in new groups afterward. Gender and past
Table 7-22 A logit analysis of how different variables are related to group membership in Dolores Merendón during 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Member of a Group</td>
<td>14.532</td>
<td>139.219</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10.709</td>
<td>43.879</td>
<td>0.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>-0.269</td>
<td>0.330</td>
<td>0.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>3.473</td>
<td>93.411</td>
<td>0.970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-5.995</td>
<td>186.821</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Politics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td>2.142</td>
<td>23.731</td>
<td>0.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>-7.563</td>
<td>71.171</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>4.162</td>
<td>23.735</td>
<td>0.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>-3.108</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicted Overall</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting Group Membership</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell $R^2$</td>
<td>0.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting No Group Member.</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>43.098</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Are you currently a member of a community group?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

Group experiences also had a significant correlation with group membership. This dependent variable was associated with sex by a Cramer’s $V$ of 0.341 and with past group membership with a $V = 0.688$, both at a 0.000 significance level. When these and a series of other variables were analyzed through logistic regression, however, the influence of both gender and past organizational experiences on group membership was rendered statistically insignificant (See Table 7-22). In fact, none of the independent variables that were measured through various logit models seemed to have a statistically significant effect on organization. These results make it more probable that NGOs were the critical factor accounting for group membership in 2000.

The qualitative data gathered in Dolores Merendón revealed that aid agencies did more than simply encourage an increase in citizen organization. They also worked directly with the municipal government in order to help them improve their
administrative skills and relationship with local residents. An Italian NGO, the Associazone per la Partecipazione all Sviluppo (APS or Association for Participation in Development) began working in Dolores in 1998. APS taught local officials how to conduct a cadastral survey and use it as a basis for tax collection. In addition, they together with ASONOG helped local government officials make projections on their yearly revenue and draft municipal development plans on the basis of this. These organizations also emphasized the need to incorporate regular citizens in their decision-making process. APS offered workshops on citizen participation to political officials from the department of Ocotepeque while ASONOG encouraged this type of political behavior through more informal means.

Both of these NGOs tried to strengthen the CODEM (Comité de Desarrollo Municipal) in Dolores Merendón, a citizen consultative body that had been established here by PRODERE during the mid 1990’s after the successful experience with these types of groups in San Marcos. Unfortunately, the CODEM had been given relatively little support in Dolores and had never become truly functional. Despite its flaws, local residents had not abandoned the idea of this consultative body. The mayor of Dolores had formed a new CODEM in 1998 soon after entering office even though PRODERE was no longer present to encourage such action. The group, however, had not held a single meeting during its first two years of existence and its members did not understand their proper role or function. Consequently, the CODEM had not fulfilled its role as a political advisory body, and its members knew little about what the municipal government was doing. APS and ASONOG sought to improve this situation by

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73 Interview with Joaquín Lara and María Lidia Cruz, Members of the CODEM, June 5, 2000.
working with the members of the CODEM and the mayor in order to clarify the purpose of this organization, strengthen its consultative powers, and help it maintain a regular level of contact with the municipal government.

APS and ASONOG also convinced municipal officials from Dolores Merendón that they should sponsor *cabildos abiertos* in order to improve their communication with local citizens. As a result, the mayor hosted three such events just in 2000. The existence of *cabildos* together with the increased organizational activity in the municipality seems to have encouraged citizens to become more active in these types of public forums. Only 13% of the people surveyed had attended a *cabildo abierto* before Mitch and the advent of NGOs. But between November 1999 and April 2000 20% of them had participated in such events. A One sample T-Test showed that there was a statistically significant though slight difference in mean *cabildo* attendance during both time periods (See Table 7-23).

Table 7-23 One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch *cabildo* attendance in Dolores Merendón

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabildo Attendance in Dolores Merendón in 2000</td>
<td>2.419</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>.01 Lower, .13 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey response to whether residents had attended a *cabildo abierto* before Mitch and the advent of NGOs in Dolores Merendón.

A person’s involvement in community groups was strongly associated with their likelihood of attending *cabildo abiertos*. The measure of association between group membership and this form of political participation was $V = 0.386$ with a 0.000 level of significance. The logit model on Table 7.24 further shows the positive and statistically significant effects of organization on *cabildo* attendance. The beta coefficient for group
Table 7-24 A logit model analyzing how different variables are associated with post Mitch cabildo attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>2.582</td>
<td>19.897</td>
<td>0.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>-4.267</td>
<td>39.792</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>2.160</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>0.280</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>0.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Voted Before</td>
<td>8.199</td>
<td>20.505</td>
<td>0.689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Attended a Cabildo Before</td>
<td>2.044</td>
<td>0.649</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Government Official after Mitch</td>
<td>0.336</td>
<td>0.783</td>
<td>0.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Government Official before Mitch</td>
<td>2.681</td>
<td>1.322</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-15.540</td>
<td>28.599</td>
<td>0.587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % Correctly Predicted Overall | 82.2 | N  | 163 |
| % Correctly Predicting Cabildo Attendance | 44.1 | Cox & Snell R^2 | 0.323 |
| % Correctly Predicting No Cabildo Attendance | 92.2 | 2 Log Likelihood | 103.456 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Have you attended a cabildo abierto since Mitch?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

membership allows us to determine that the people who participated in local organizations were almost nine times more likely to assist these events than those who were not so involved. Given this information, it should come as no surprise that cabildo attendance increased in Dolores at the same time as did group membership. This data helps support H3, the hypothesis that a more organized citizenry will increase its participation in politics and level of communication with government officials.
Organization was not the only variable that helped explain why a resident from Dolores attended *cabildos abiertos*. Poverty as well as a person’s past experiences with political participation also had a significant influence on their likelihood of attending these public events. The logit model on Table 7-24 allows us to predict that an organized male resident with a mean poverty level who had contacted a government official and participated in a *cabildo* in the past had a 99.6% probability of attending these types of meetings again in 2000 while a comparable male with no organizational or past political experiences only had a 21% probability of doing the same.

The *cabildos* that were staged in Dolores during 2000 helped inform citizens about the municipal government’s activities and increased their impact on local decision-making processes. The mayor, for example, used these public forums to explain to residents the need to collect property taxes. The local government had gathered only 2200 lempiras (then equivalent to approximately $200) through this mean during 1998 and a comparable amount in the years preceding then because most citizens did not pay their duty.74 As a result, the municipal government had been limited in the number of projects it had been able to undertake. Through *cabildos*, the mayor explained to citizens that if they collected more taxes they would be able to sponsor more development projects for the benefit of the entire municipality. Citizens used these forums to express their opposition to taxes and belief that it was unjust when imposed on such an extremely poor population as theirs. Although the mayor believed in the benefits of taxation, he refused to enforce its collection after hearing citizens’ views on the matter through *cabildos*. He knew that if he collected this revenue against people’s wishes, the local

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74 Interview with Angel Guzmán, Mayor of Dolores Merendón, April 3, 2000.
population would not vote for him or his party again and might even become his personal enemies. Thus, these public forums enabled citizens to communicate better and reach a consensus with their local government.

Despite the impact residents were able to have on local politics through *cabildos abiertos*, few of those sampled who had participated in these events thought they had been given any decision-making power through them. In fact, although the number of people participating in *cabildos* increased during 2000, attendees claimed to have had less of a decision-making role in them than previously. Only 11% said they had been allowed to vote in these forums, and 8% said they had made decisions through non-voting means (See Table 7-25). Most claimed they were only allowed to express their opinions or make proposals in the *cabildos* held after Mitch. Although these suggestions may have influenced local government policies, as evidenced by the previously mentioned case of taxation, those surveyed seemed to desire a more direct or overt role in political decisions.

The residents from Dolores Merendón not only became more involved in *cabildos* during the year and a half after Mitch, but also initiated contact with their political Table 7-25 How residents from Dolores Merendón have participated in *cabildos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Before Mitch</th>
<th>After Mitch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed an Opinion</td>
<td>82% of attendees</td>
<td>86% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed an Issue</td>
<td>32% of attendees</td>
<td>31% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Proposal</td>
<td>27% of attendees</td>
<td>39% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>41% of attendees</td>
<td>11% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Decision</td>
<td>32% of attendees</td>
<td>8% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented a Project</td>
<td>14% of attendees</td>
<td>13% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Listened</td>
<td>14% of attendees</td>
<td>8% of attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7-26  One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch government contact in Dolores Merendón

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Contact in Dolores Merendón in 2000</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.794</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.02 Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11 Upper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean of survey response to whether residents had contacted a government official before Mitch and the advent of NGOs in Dolores Merendón.

representatives more frequently than they had previously. Before the intervention of NGOs in the area only 3.4% of those surveyed had contacted a political official to discuss a problem, need or concern. But from late 1998 to April 2000 9.6% of people surveyed had initiated such contact. A one sample T-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean level of contact surveyed residents experienced during the year and a half after Mitch and the period preceding it (See Table 7-26).

Two main variables help account for who was most likely to contact a government official in 1999 and 2000: a person’s past experience with government contact and their self-proclaimed interest in politics (See Table 7-27). A person who had contacted a political official before Mitch was thirty one times more likely to do so again after the intervention of NGOs in the area than someone who had no such experience. Likewise, someone who claimed to be very interested in politics was four times more likely to initiate this type of political activity than someone who had no interest in the subject. Unlike the case of cabildos, whether or not a person participated in a local group did not have any statistically significant impact on their likelihood of contacting a government official. In fact most of the people who had engaged in this type of activity after Mitch were not members of a local group. Therefore, this case lends no support to H₃.
Table 7-27 A logit model analyzing how different variables are associated with post
Mitch government contact in Dolores Merendón

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>2.515</td>
<td>7.535</td>
<td>0.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>-3.356</td>
<td>15.057</td>
<td>0.824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.683</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>1.338</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Voted Before</td>
<td>1.541</td>
<td>1.521</td>
<td>0.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo after Mitch</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>0.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Attended a Cabildo Before</td>
<td>-0.198</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Government Official before Mitch</td>
<td>3.427</td>
<td>1.190</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-7.115</td>
<td>7.811</td>
<td>0.362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 92.0 | N                  | 163 |
% Correctly Predicting Contact | 25.0 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.183 |
% Correctly Predicting No Contact | 99.3 | 2 Log Likelihood | 71.275 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Since Mitch, have you contacted someone in the government to talk to them about a problem, need or concern?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

The political activities evident in Dolores Merendón were completely focused on local issues and constrained to the municipal level. Most of the individuals (88%) who admitted contacting a government official after Mitch had sought out their mayor for assistance. The remainder had spoken to other local government officials. There was no evidence that citizens maintained a significant level of contact with politicians outside of their municipality. In fact, communication with diputados and other national-level politicians was difficult and rare even for the mayor of Dolores. There is no phone service in this municipality which can be used to contact national government offices and
transportation to the capital remains lengthy and difficult. The lack of time, attention and importance that several of the mayors from Ocotepeque claim to receive from national government officials further deters them from maintaining a good channel of communication with them. Surveyed residents also seemed to be indifferent or oblivious to broader political concerns—something which further localizes political activity.

Eighty percent of the Dolores sample admitted having little or no interest in national politics, a quarter received no political news at all and another 60% received limited information on this issue. Not surprisingly, residents here had not participated in any marches or public protests, and many did not even understand what these types of activities were.

Despite this detachment from national-level politics, residents here, like those in the other municipalities under study, did engage actively in voting. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed had voted in at least one election in the past. An overwhelming percentage of those who had not exercised their suffrage did so because they were too young to vote. Resident’s commitment to participate in future elections also remained firm. Nearly 98% of those surveyed said they would vote in 2001 and only three residents or 2% of the sample said they would not participate in future elections. Like the residents from Potrerillos, most of those in Dolores vote because they believe it is their duty to do so. However, unlike residents in the other three municipalities under study, how people vote here is almost completely determined by local issues and concerns. This is largely due to the area’s extreme detachment from the rest of the country. Once people believe that an individual will be a good mayor and help solve their local problems, they vote for him and those politicians within his party whom he
supports. Interestingly, residents do not seem to expect local politicians to dramatically change their mode of life. The extreme penury, material needs and ignorance of the area have made residents expect as well as demand little from their government. A politician can easily gain support from residents with the promise of only a few, simple projects and a gregarious personality.

Dolores Merendón was selected as a case study in order to test whether the intervention of external aid agencies alone could provoke greater citizen organization (H2). The research conducted here during April 2000 revealed that despite the traditional individualistic life style of this municipality NGO activities had encouraged residents to become more organized and work jointly on several projects. New groups had been established, the percentage of people participating in them had doubled and residents generally believed that their community was more organized than previously. Some of the people working in Dolores have explained that by the end of 2000 residents were more willing to work communally with others and a much stronger cooperative spirit had developed here than the one that was observed earlier in the year.75 All of this supports H2 and suggests that even communities with little history of cooperative endeavors may develop a vibrant civic society if encouraged to do so by external forces.

Field research also revealed that citizens became more active in politics during the year and a half after NGOs began working in Dolores. A greater percentage of residents participated in cabildos abiertos and contacted government officials during this period than previously. The CODEM also was strengthened so as to allow local citizens greater participation in local decisions. Although part of this political change may be attributed

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75 Personal communication with Carlos Espinoza, teacher in Dolores Merendón, December 1, 2000.
to the improved level of organization in the area, there is insufficient evidence to support 
H2, the hypothesis that a more organized citizenry participates more actively in politics. 
It is possible that this link between organization and political participation was not 
evidenced more clearly in Dolores because of the region’s still nascent level of 
organization in April 2000 when field research was being conducted here. However, 
qualitative research does suggest that the presence of NGOs in the area helps to partly 
explain the improved political climate in Dolores. APS and ASONOG’s work with 
municipal authorities helped open new and improve old channels of communication 
between citizens and the municipal government. Both of these NGOs encouraged local 
government officials to become more receptive to citizen inputs and increase their 
participation in political decision-making. As a result, more *cabildos abiertos* were 
offered and the CODEM was restructured and strengthened. All of these changes suggest 
that the intervention of NGOs in Dolores helped promote a more vibrant civil society as 
well as improve local governance. The case of San Marcos will help us understand how 
the withdrawal of external aid agencies can affect the organization and political 
participation they have stimulated in an area.

**San Marcos**

Like Dolores Merendón, San Marcos was not affected by Hurricane Mitch. Fifteen 
percent of the 331 sampled houses experienced only minor damage as a result of this 
storm while the remaining percentage encountered no adverse effects. Unlike Potrerillos 
and Sabá, the municipality’s infrastructure was not affected by Mitch either. Although 
San Marcos’ coffee-dependent economy did experience a depression in 1999 and 2000, 
this was due more to a drastic drop in world coffee prices than to a Mitch-related 
economic factor. Not surprisingly, San Marcos did not qualify for any FHIS-funded
emergency projects\textsuperscript{76} nor received any new development assistance from external aid organizations. The only agencies that were working in this municipality when dissertation research was conducted here were continuing or at best deepening projects that were already in place before Mitch. Consequently, no significant social or political change was expected to be observed here. This municipality was selected for study so that it could serve as a control case with which to compare and contrast changes that have occurred in the other three municipal cases. The case of San Marcos also allows us to observe how a radical and improved transformation in local governance will evolve after the external agencies that have prompted such a change have withdrawn from the region.

PRODERE, the United Nations program that had encouraged greater organization and political involvement among San Marcos’ inhabitants, was terminated in 1995. The project’s end caused some to worry whether the socio-political activism that had been achieved here during the first half of the 1990’s would collapse in the absence of external support. After all, residents would no longer have an economic incentive to organize and work together for common goals, and the municipal government would cease having outside agents regularly monitoring its activities, offering its members training and encouraging them to maintain a strong network of communication with local citizens.

Surprisingly, San Marcos remained fairly well organized despite PRODERE’s termination. The surveys conducted in the area during May and June of 2000 revealed that this municipality had a level of organization comparable to Sabá’s. Over 20\% of the people questioned reported that they belonged to some community group. CEBs, agricultural associations and NGOs were the organizations with which most of these

individuals were affiliated. Patronatos, juntas de agua and other such traditional groups ranked second in importance to these. In general, men and rural residents were more likely to participate in groups than females and urbanites. Education and wealth also had a positive effect on organization. The logit model on Table 7-28 helps us determine that a male rural resident with a mean age and poverty level and some secondary schooling had a 62% probability of belonging to a group in 2000 while a comparable female urban resident with no schooling had a 6% probability of being organized.

Although one in five adult residents continued to be involved in local groups during 2000, collaborative endeavors were not necessarily easy to achieve in San Marcos. Forty one percent of those surveyed believed it was difficult to work with others while 42% thought it was easy. A majority (56%), however, said that cooperative work had neither deteriorated nor improved in the period after Mitch. Working with neighbors was just as easy to them as it had been previously.

Table 7-28 A logit model analyzing how different variables are associated with group membership in San Marcos during 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>-1.536</td>
<td>0.437</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>1.131</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.298</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicted Overall</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting Contact</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell $R^2$</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly Predicting No Contact</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>272.210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Are you currently a member of a community group?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.
Survey participants also believed that their municipality was as well organized in 2000 as it had been during the pre-Mitch period. Half of them described the organization in their community as active or moderate at the time of field research, 26% characterized it as weak while only 4% said it was non-existent. A similar percentage response was given to describe the level of organization in San Marcos before Mitch (See Table 7-29). A One Sample T-Test confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean response residents gave to characterize their municipality during both time periods (See Table 7-30).

Table 7-30 One-sample t test comparing perceptions of community organization in San Marcos in 2000 with the pre-Mitch period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Test Value = 3.31*)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organization in 2000 (San Marcos)</td>
<td>-0.831</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.19 Lower 0.08 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The test value represents the mean of survey participants’ perceptions of how their community’s organization was before Mitch.

The continued and active presence of locally-based NGOs, agricultural associations and the Catholic Church helped sustain much of the organizational activity of San

77 Since Mitch had been used as a landmark event to distinguish between two different time periods in the other municipalities under study, this trend was continued in the case of San Marcos. When residents were asked about conditions in their municipality before Mitch, they tended to think of the PRODERE era, i.e., the first half of the 1990’s.
Marcos beyond the PRODERE period. All of these organizations encourage residents to join community groups and undertake new projects. As a result, a self-sustaining process of organization developed here whereby local groups continually motivated residents to remain socially active. Hermandad de Honduras, for example, continued to support the formation of agricultural groups by teaching them how to use sustainable farming methods and offering them financial assistance. CCD kept working with CODECOs (Communal Development Committees) in the municipality by training leaders, animating community participation and helping villagers diagnose their needs and problems. In the midst of a dramatic drop in coffee prices and a local economic crisis in 1999, several members of a coffee association (Asociación de Productores de Café, APROCAFE) began encouraging female residents to establish a coffee processing enterprise in order to sell their beans at a better market price than they would otherwise. This micro-enterprise was initiated in January 2000 with thirteen female members and the financial and technical support of both ADEVAS and APROCAFE. Within just a few months the women had opened their own store and were planning on marketing their product throughout Honduras. At times, local organizations encouraged residents to undertake new projects without necessarily joining new groups. The Catholic Church, for example, launched a project in 1995 to build a training center for Delegates of the Word and CEB members. Lay activists sponsored several local marathons which collected over $20,000 between 1995 and 1998. They also succeeded in acquiring a $30,000 donation from a

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78 Interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999.

79 Interviews with several members of this coffee micro-enterprise, April 25, 2000.
German organization. As a result of their efforts, the new center was completed in 2000.\textsuperscript{80}

The area’s past history with organization is another important factor helping to explain the level of social activism in San Marcos. Collaborative endeavors are not new to this region, as was explained in the previous chapter. Residents had been accustomed to resolving problems on their own and in collaboration with neighbors for decades before the arrival of PRODERE. This characteristic of San Marcos did not change upon the UNDP’s withdrawal from the area. Patronatos continued to tackle what local problems they could. If a road fell into a state of disrepair, residents united to improve it.\textsuperscript{81} If the water pipes in a community broke, the junta de agua or patronato asked the municipal government for financial assistance so that they could replace the damaged parts. In one aldea, a group of relatively wealthy residents contributed their own money and labor in order to bring electricity to part of their community. When other neighbors saw their success, they asked the municipal government to subsidize the cost of electrifying the rest of the aldea and supplied the labor and financial resources needed to complete the project.

Some of the recent organizational activities in San Marcos have moved beyond merely the municipal level. During March 2000 some of the citizens from San Marcos and the neighboring municipality of San Francisco del Valle began meeting in order to discuss the possibility of taking over a school building that had been abandoned by the national government. Some residents thought that instead of allowing this structure to

\textsuperscript{80} Clare Cleo, Sarah Smith Pearse and Judith Turbyne, Ideas para financiar proyectos comunitarios, (Tegucigalpa: Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, 1998).

\textsuperscript{81} This type of activity was evident in several of the urban neighborhoods in San Marcos.
remain unused, it should be reopened as a technical school and managed locally by those who best understood the region’s educational needs. All agreed that there were several university graduates in the area who could offer courses here. Soon after their first meeting, interested residents began raising funds for this idea and requesting help from local NGOs on how they should go about soliciting the national government’s support for their plan. ASONOG responded by offering them training courses and logistical support. During the series of meetings that followed, residents suggested that if the municipal governments and civil society groups of neighboring municipalities joined them in forming one united front to request support for this locally-managed, technical school, they would have a better chance of receiving a favorable response from the central government. This idea soon evolved into a more ambitious one of creating a permanent association of municipalities from the Valley of Sensenti which could more forcefully present the region’s demands before the national government. By 2001 the Asociación de Municipios del Valle de Sensenti had successfully been established in large part due to the initiatives of a few, socially active residents from San Marcos and San Francisco.

The residents of San Marcos have also managed to sustain a moderate level of contact with their political representatives. Only 8% percent of those surveyed said they had contacted a government official before Mitch, but 12% claimed to have done the same during the year and a half after Mitch. Most of these individuals (85%) had sought assistance from the mayor. However, 13% of them had spoken to a national-level politician such as a congressman or minister.

Two main factors help explain who initiated government contact after Mitch: a person’s organization and their experience with similar political activities (See Table 7-
People who had contacted a politician in the past were six times more likely to do so again after Mitch while group members were five times more likely to engage in this political activity than non members. The logit model on Table 7-31 allows us to determine that a male urban resident who belonged to a community group and had previously contacted a government official had a 74% probability of doing so again after Mitch when keeping all other variables in the model constant. A comparable female resident with no such organizational and political experience only had a 7% probability of initiating contact.

Table 7-31 A logit model analyzing how different variables are associated with post Mitch government contact in San Marcos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban/Rural</strong></td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.545</td>
<td>0.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.480</td>
<td>0.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty Index</strong></td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>7.535</td>
<td>0.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>15.057</td>
<td>0.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member of a Group</strong></td>
<td>1.534</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Politics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>-0.202</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>0.954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attended a Cabildo after Mitch</strong></td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever Attended a Cabildo Before</strong></td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contacted a Government Official before Mitch</strong></td>
<td>1.825</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-3.758</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 92.0 | N | 163 |
% Correctly Predicting Contact | 25.0 | Cox & Snell R² | 0.183 |
% Correctly Predicting No Contact | 99.3 | 2 Log Likelihood | 71.275 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “From Mitch until now, have you contacted someone in the government to talk to them about a need, problem or concern?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.
Unfortunately, other forms of political activity declined in San Marcos after PRODERE’s end. Only 9% of surveyed residents said they had attended a cabildo abierto during the year and a half after Mitch while 22% of them had participated in these public events before then. A one sample T test confirmed that there was a statistically significant decline in mean cabildo attendance between both time periods (See Table 7-32). This decrease is explained partly by the municipal government’s faint support of cabildos abiertos after PRODERE’s end. Between 1995 and 1997 only three such events were held in San Marcos. Although the number of cabildos increased to one or two per year after Mitch, they did not become as prevalent as they were during the PRODERE period nor as frequent as the Law of Municipalities states they should be.

The logistic regression model on Table 7-33 helps explain which residents were most likely to attend cabildos abiertos during the post Mitch period. As was discovered in the case of government contact, organization was a strong predictor of this form of political activity. Residents who were members of a local group were five times more likely to attend a cabildo than non-members. Gender and a person’s past experiences

Table 7-32 One-sample t test to measure the mean difference in pre and post Mitch Cabildo attendance in San Marcos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Test Value = 0.22*)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabildo Attendance in San Marcos in 2000</td>
<td>-7.878</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.16 Lower -0.09 Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Test value represents the mean survey response to whether people had attended a cabildo before Mitch.

in the case of government contact, organization was a strong predictor of this form of political activity. Residents who were members of a local group were five times more likely to attend a cabildo than non-members. Gender and a person’s past experiences

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82 This opinion was shared by every person interviewed in San Marcos as part of this research.

Table 7-33 A logit model analyzing post-Mitch *cabildo* attendance in San Marcos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.735</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>-0.171</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>0.469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary Education</td>
<td>-0.311</td>
<td>0.463</td>
<td>0.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary Education +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Group</td>
<td>1.534</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Interest</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Interest</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Interest</td>
<td>-0.735</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Cabildo before Mitch</td>
<td>1.513</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Government Official after Mitch</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>0.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Government Official before Mitch</td>
<td>-1.611</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-6.106</td>
<td>1.189</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Correctly Predicted Overall | 91.7 | N | 313 |
% Correctly Predicting *Cabildo* Attendance | 20.7 | Cox & Snell R^2 | 0.143 |
% Correctly Predicting No *Cabildo* Attendance | 98.9 | 2 Log Likelihood | 144.949 |

Note: The dependent variable is a response to the question, “Have you attended a *cabildo abierto* since Mitch?” The answers are coded 0=no, 1=yes.

Table 7-34 How residents from San Marcos have participated in *cabildos abiertos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Before Mitch</th>
<th>After Mitch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed an Opinion</td>
<td>56% of attendees</td>
<td>58% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed an Issue</td>
<td>46% of attendees</td>
<td>42% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Proposal</td>
<td>39% of attendees</td>
<td>42% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>61% of attendees</td>
<td>61% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Decision</td>
<td>49% of attendees</td>
<td>21% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented a Project</td>
<td>29% of attendees</td>
<td>13% of attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Listened</td>
<td>29% of attendees</td>
<td>19% of attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with *cabildos* also helped explain who attended these public forums. A male group member with past *cabildo* experience had a 61% probability of participating in these events after Mitch while a comparable female with no organizational or political experience only had a 1% probability of doing the same.

Despite these drawbacks, those who attended *cabildos abiertos* after Mitch explained that they were able to continue participating in these events just as actively as they had previously. A majority of attendees were able to express an opinion or discuss an issue. Voting also remained a key form of arriving at group decisions. As Table 7-34 illustrates, the *cabildos* that were sponsored in San Marcos both before and after Mitch were more participatory than the ones held in all the other municipal cases under study. This is a testament to the successful political training PRODERE offered residents during the early 1990’s.

Qualitative data also revealed that the CODEM was weakened after PRODERE’s withdrawal from the region and, consequently, became a less effective vehicle of citizen-government communication. The CODEM in San Marcos was restructured soon after PRODERE’s end such that members ceased being elected by popular assembly as they once were. Instead, they are appointed by the mayor—a procedure advocated by the 1990 Law of Municipalities. During the CODEM’s first years of existence, PRODERE transported rural residents to the municipal hall and offered them lunch so that they could attend meetings. Since the municipal government lacked the funds to offer such benefits and transportation from rural communities remained difficult, the mayor only appointed urbanites to this consultative group. For this same reason, *patronatos* ceased being
represented in this organization as well.\textsuperscript{84} The CODEM also met less frequently than it did during its first creation. Members gather periodically when a special project or event presented itself.\textsuperscript{85} The various committees that form part of this citizen body meet sporadically and initiated few development projects. Consequently, community groups did not solicit help from their municipal government nor implement projects as frequently as they did during the early 1990’s.

There are several hypotheses as to why these types of political participation have declined in San Marcos during the past few years. Some people believe this change has been prompted by the withdrawal of PRODERE’s economic support. Since there is less money for development projects, residents have less of an incentive to participate in either the CODEM or cabildos abiertos.\textsuperscript{86} PRODERE’s withdrawal has also resulted in less external motivation for political participation. Although many of the NGOs in the area continue to encourage the formation and persistence of working groups, they have not encouraged members to become involved in local politics. In addition, the municipal government does not invite residents to work with it as it did during the early 1990’s.\textsuperscript{87}

The result, as one community member explained, is that \textit{“si nadie … motiva la participación, la participación tiende a decaer.”}\textsuperscript{88}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Interview with Jesus Orlando Guerra, Mayor of San Marcos (1990-1994 and 1998-2001), July 17, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Interview with Rafael Mejia, President of Hermandad de Honduras and Member of the CODEM, May 9, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Interview with Rafael Mejia, President of Hermandad de Honduras and Member of the CODEM, May 9, 2000; interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999; and interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, July 17, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Interview with Jesus Orlando Guerra, Mayor of San Marcos (1990-1994 and 1998-2001), July 17, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{88} “If no one … motivates participation, participation tends to fall.” Interview with Rafael Mejia, President of Hermandad de Honduras, November 16, 1999.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
This changed socio-political context has facilitated a return to traditional, clientelist politics in San Marcos. Many of the projects that have been implemented here during the late 1990’s and early 2000 have been offered by local politicians in return for voter support. Communities have not been asked to participate in the choice and implementation of these projects as they were during the PRODERE period. This has not only deactivated many groups but also divided local society along traditional party lines. Some believe that politicians have purposefully used these divisive tactics in order to curtail civil society’s past activism. As one individual explained, “el hecho que la sociedad quiere participar perjudica su abilidad de manipular” 89

Locally-based NGO’s are not unaware of the changes in political participation that have occurred in San Marcos during the late 1990’s. At the time field research was being conducted in the area, leaders of various development groups expressed concern about the changed political atmosphere and were conscious of their need to do something about it. As one NGO president expressed, “La sociedad tiene potencial pero tenemos que hacer algo … darles un acompanamiento.” 90 AESMO chose to respond to this situation by launching a project aimed at reanimating residents’ participation in the municipal government. CCD began working with the Communal Development Committees (CODECOs) of six aldeas in order to encourage villagers to determine their own project needs and develop community development plans in a highly participatory manner. These CODECOs were then encouraged to take their plans to the mayor and try to

89 “The fact that society wants to participate threatens their [politicians’] ability to manipulate.” Interview with Victor Saravia, President of AESMO, November 17, 1999.

90 “The society has potential but we have to do something … give it some accompaniment.” Interview with Victor Saravia, President of AESMO, November 17, 1999.
integrate them into the broader municipal development plan.\footnote{91 Interview with Sebastian Melgar, Member of CCD in San Marcos, November 17, 1999.} ADEVAS also was in the process of organizing sixteen different community groups who would be offered credit as well as taught about their local government and how to integrate themselves in it. ADEVAS’ goal was to train people on how to better impact their political system and be less partisan. As the organization’s director explained, “Todo lo que estamos hablando [con estos grupos] es ideológico.”\footnote{92 “Everything we are talking about [with these groups] is ideological.” Interview with José Calvin Fuentes, Executive Director of ADEVAS, November 19, 2000.} Together, each of these projects may succeed in reanimating citizen involvement in local government.

Whether or not these NGO activities achieve this goal, it is important to highlight that several important organizational and political processes instituted by PRODERE have been preserved despite that program’s end. AESMO and CODEPO not only have endured but have progressively grown into stronger and more representative regional organizations. The CODEM also continues to exist. Although this group is no longer as active or inclusive as it once was, it still serves as a valuable means through which community leaders and the municipal government can regularly communicate, exchange ideas and collaborate on projects. Perhaps more importantly, the CODEM continues to exert considerable influence on local political representatives. Almost every community in San Marcos now has a \textit{patronato} whose members are elected through a popular assembly. Some of the organizations that PRODERE helped strengthen such as AESMO and Hermandad have grown in membership and regional scope. They now undertake a greater and more diverse set of projects than they did during the initial years of their existence, and they promise to serve as catalysts for the continued organization and
political development of the region. All of this suggests that the various training courses offered to residents during the early 1990’s has prevented the good governance that was established here from being completely undermined.

San Marcos offers several lessons that can be used to understand the socio-political processes that were witnessed in the other three municipalities under study. First, San Marcos reveals that once a strong level of organization has been achieved in a community, it may be sustained even if the agents that prompted such activism have withdrawn from the area. This is particularly true if the region had some history of cooperation and if local groups have been left in place to continually encourage citizens to work collaboratively. Although the case of San Marcos also reveals that there is a strong nexus between organization and political activism, it shows that the presence of the former does not always assure the existence of the later. A government’s actions can either encourage or limit the extent to which a community participates in politics. Good governance is most likely to be maintained when an organized citizenry desires to participate in political decision-making and the government responds to them by creating vehicles through which citizens can communicate their views and develop policies together with their political representatives. Although external agencies or civil society groups may pressure for such a political opening, the government could easily relapse into a closed and authoritarian style of governance if they are not continually pressured to do otherwise. The case of San Marcos also suggests that the governance changes that have occurred in Honduras at both a local and national level after Mitch could be overturned if international and domestic pressure for reform is eased.
Conclusion

We embarked on our exploration of four Honduran municipalities in order to determine whether either a major natural disaster or the intervention of external aid organizations could prompt a socio-political change on a population group. It was hypothesized at the onset that these two independent variables would increase the level of social organization in an affected community. Since the literature on civil society suggests that a well organized society tends to participate more in politics, we further hypothesized that greater social activism in a municipality would lead to greater political participation and a more participatory form of local governance.

The research conducted in Potrerillos and Sabá suggests that a disaster alone does not alter a population’s level of organization. Therefore, our first hypothesis (H1) has been disproved. Although there was a heightened degree of cooperation, solidarity and volunteerism in these two areas during the immediate post-Mitch, emergency period, this social behavior began to disintegrate once daily life returned to some state of normalcy. Nevertheless, this short-lived period of heightened activism seemed to be a window of opportunity for longer-term social change. However, other factors had to intervene to induce the desired transformation while this window was still open. This is precisely what occurred in Sabá. Just as the Food for Work program was terminated there and all emergency working groups began to disappear, a series of external aid agencies began initiating reconstruction projects there and requiring beneficiaries to organize and work together for their joint profit. By the end of 2000 when field research was being conducted in Sabá, one out of every five adults there was participating in some community organization. This represented a doubling of group membership from the
pre-Mitch period. Although men were slightly more active than women, a significant number of both gender groups were socially active.

Our research further suggests that the intervention of external aid agencies alone can alter the organizational behavior of a population group. So, our second hypothesis (H2) has been confirmed also. However, it remains unclear how much outside agency support is required to prompt such a transformation or how dramatic or enduring the shift in behavior will be once achieved. The residents of Dolores Merendón became more organized after three NGOs had been working in the area for less than a year. Still, by April 2000 only 10% of the people surveyed were members of a community group. The little organization present in Dolores Merendón was frail and could easily have disappeared with the withdrawal of external agency support. Both the region’s lack of experience with cooperative endeavors and the recent presence of NGOs there can explain this weak level of organization. It is possible that the residents of Dolores have become more socially active in the months following my field research and that the continued presence of NGOs there may secure a long term-change in group activism. Further research would have to be done in order to determine whether such changes have indeed occurred.

The case of Sabá reveals that people can be encouraged to organize and work together by external aid agencies. The level of group membership in the area had doubled to 20% of surveyed residents by September 2000, nearly two years after Mitch. The fact that over seven aid agencies had been working in several communities for several months to two years suggests that the intervention must be massive in order to induce such a change. It is unclear whether the level of organization witnessed in Sabá at
the end of 2000 was sufficiently strong to endure the withdrawal of external support. As in Dolores, it appeared as if external aid agencies had to remain active there for a much longer period of time to assure a sustainable level of organization.

San Marcos, though originally selected only as a control case, helps shed light on how foreign-induced community organization may be made to endure in the long term. This municipality experienced a seemingly dramatic social change during the first half of the 1990’s as a result of a multi-million dollar UNDP program known as PRODERE. PRODERE encouraged residents to become more organized, diagnose their needs and undertake self-identified projects so that they could become agents of their own development. Although no quantitative data is available to show how or to what degree the organization of San Marcos was transformed as a result of this project, all of the interviews conducted in the area suggest that the change was significant. Most interestingly, San Marcos still evidenced a high level of organization five years after PRODERE’s withdrawal. As in Sabá, 20% of the adults interviewed here were members of a community group in 2000. Several factors seem to account for the sustainability of this process. First, cooperative endeavors are not new to the people of San Marcos. The residents here have a long history of organization that was only fortified by the presence of PRODERE. PRODERE, moreover, was a massive development project that lasted four years during which time UNDP agents were able to work with almost every community in San Marcos. However, even with these characteristics, the level of organization in this municipality may have declined significantly after this project’s withdrawal had local agencies not been established and/or strengthened so as to ensure the continued vibrancy of the region’s social activism. The presence of locally-based
agencies such as ADEVAS, AESMO, Hermandad and CCD have made the continuation of external agency support here unnecessary. These NGOs are charged with continually monitoring their social reality and adopting projects that will ensure that the residents of San Marcos remain organized. This together with the region’s history and the impact of PRODERE have helped San Marcos achieve and maintain the level of organization it has today.

The municipal field research conducted for this dissertation also offers some support for H₃, the hypothesis that a more organized citizenry will improve its level of communication with government. Potrerillos did not experience any significant or long lasting organizational change. Consequently, its residents did not become more involved in politics. However, those areas that did develop a more vibrant civil society saw a rise in citizen political involvement. This was especially the case in Sabá where the percentage of people participating in community groups doubled after Mitch and the arrival of external agencies. The heightened level of organization here prompted residents to contact their political representatives more frequently than before and demand the creation of newer channels of communication with their municipal government. The case of Dolores Merendón also offers some support for H₃. The recent rise in the area’s organization prompted group members to contact their government representatives more often than before. However, it did not help account for the increased level of attendance in cabildos abiertos. It is possible that the relationship between organization and political participation was not evidence more clearly in Dolores Merendón because community groups were still in an incipient stage of development.
when field research was being conducted here. However, in the absence of further research, more definitive support for $H_3$ can not be offered by this case.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Disasters have a dramatic socio-political impact. Victims may be cut off from the rest of the world during the immediate aftermath of such an event and be forced to confront the crisis on their own. Non-affected groups may show their compassion and solidarity to less fortunate neighbors by rushing to their aid during this period. All of this may help create stronger community bonds. But a disaster’s effects are not constrained to the social sphere. The state’s ability to respond to these crisis quickly, efficiently and with fairness can either garner support for the regime or bring it into question. The foreign aid that often flows into a disaster-stricken area may serve as an additional impetus for change. Depending on its scope and level of intervention, foreign assistance may help strengthen civil society and pressure the state to change inefficient or undemocratic practices. This chapter reviews how a major natural disaster and foreign assistance have been found to impact national and sub-national governance in Honduras and discusses how these findings contribute to existing theories on these subjects.

The Socio-Political Effects of Disasters

The theoretical literature on disasters, much of which has been produced by sociologists and anthropologists, argues that victims tend to organize and develop common survival strategies in order to confront these crisis events. New social groups may emerge during the immediate aftermath of a disaster and work with preexisting ones in order to meet people’s basic needs. All of this may increase the level of citizen activism, dismantle class and ethnic differences and lead to a reconfiguration of society in
the short term. However, none of these changes have been proven to be long-lasting. Emergent groups usually disband soon after they have been formed and people revert to their pre-disaster mode of life soon after the emergency has passed. Political scientist recently have noted that in a few cases, emergent groups have endured and contributed to the development of civil society. They also have argued that disasters may lead to significant political change, particularly in countries with an inequitable distribution of wealth and/or a history of social or political strife. However, these scholars have not delineated just how a disaster might contribute to such a transformation. One could deduce from different research on this topic that a disaster can strengthen or contribute to the emergence of civil society and thus lead to broader, political change. This dissertation has tried to discover whether disasters do indeed catalyze such a process.

The research presented here supports the contention that disasters increase levels of organization and solidarity among an affected population. Both the municipalities of Sabá and Potrerillos experienced a dramatic increase in community cooperation and organization during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. Neighbors worked together to rescue, feed and house those most in need. They labored to shovel mud from the streets and repair public facilities. In addition, the crisis animated previously existing community groups. Local Comités de Emergencia were reactivated, members of patronatos began to work more closely together and extinct cooperative members reunited in order to help meet their own collective and broader community needs.

Not all of the organizations that were formed during the immediate aftermath of Mitch were based on pre-existing ones. New groups also emerged. The mayor of Potrerillos organized a municipal-level Comité de Emergencia. In addition, dozens of
concerned citizens formed the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos in order to discuss ways of meeting their municipality’s need for potable water. Less formal organizations also began arise throughout Sabá. Recognizing their social potential, the Catholic Church offered these nascent groups training and helped them evolve into the more formal Comités de Emergencia Local (CODEL). The Catholic Church also spearheaded the creation of a national-level civil society organization that eventually adopted the name of INTERFOROS. All of these emergent groups challenged the local and national-level government and questioned the decisions made by political elites.

The organizational history of affected areas significantly influenced the way Hondurans responded to the disaster. Pre-existing groups such as local Comités de Emergencia and patronatos were reactivated and fortified after Mitch. The national-level FONAC also began meeting more frequently than previously and helped promote a better dialogue between members of different mass-based organizations. Emergent groups, though new, also built upon pre-existing social capital. INTERFOROS, for example, brought together NGOs and other civil society groups that had previously cooperated with one another on development projects. Similarly, many of those who joined emergent groups at the municipal level possessed some organizational experience. The survey data collected in Potrerillos and Sabá revealed that those people who had been involved with some community group in the past were more likely to be organized after Mitch than those who had no such experience. In fact, past group membership was a stronger predictor of organizational activity one to two years after Mitch than the disaster experience itself.
Ideally, organization experience should have been one of the key independent variables used to measure people’s responses to disaster. But in order to test and control for this third variable, four additional municipal cases would have had to have been chosen and analyzed. Unfortunately, financial and time contraints prevented such a study from being carried out. This dissertation has tried to compensate for this failing by emphasizing that organizational histories do affect people’s responses to disasters. This point was emphasized throughout the historical chapters of this dissertation and in the analysis of municipal-level surveys.

Although the onslaught of Mitch prompted affected groups to work closely together, fortified pre-existing organizations and gave rise to new ones, it did not ensure that any of this collaborative spirit would endure. Once foreign emergency organizations began to offer the residents of Potrerillos humanitarian assistance, these individuals ceased cooperating with one another. The municipal-level Comité de Emergencia and the Comité de Desarrollo de Potrerillos disbanded within only a few months after their creation. Sabá experienced a similar problem in early 1999 once the food for work program came to an end. All of this seems to support what sociologists and anthropologists have long noted—that disasters do not prompt long-term, organizational changes. It also suggests that emergency, humanitarian assistance does not foment the development of sustainable, organized groups either.

This does not mean that disasters and foreign aid do not affect civil society. Many of the emergent groups that arose in Honduras after Mitch like INTERFOROS and COPA have remained in existence and become politically active. Moreover, some region’s of the country have continued to maintain a strong level of organization despite
the general trend towards demobilization. None of these post-disaster observations are novel. Latin American scholars have noted that emergent groups have endured and civil society has been strengthened in Mexico, Nicaragua and Guatemala after earthquakes struck each of these countries during the 1970’s and 1980’s. What has been poorly explained is why these countries have exhibited this seemingly anomalous, post-disaster, social behavior. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of this issue by suggestions that other factors may account for the persistence of strong civic organizations beyond the emergency period. In particular, it suggests that the presence of foreign aid organizations, be they multilateral, bilateral or non-governmental, during the post-disaster reconstruction period can contribute to long term socio-political change.

However, this research does not dismiss the transformative power of disasters. Indeed, it emphasizes that the brief period of community activism that usually succeeds such crisis events serve as windows of opportunity for inducing more enduring socio-political change. Disasters can facilitate broader transformations by disrupting normal modes of behavior, temporarily weakening existing structures and social relations and fomenting greater levels of collaboration among victims. All of this may lead people to question existing social and spatial patterns of development and resolve to change them. This special time period may also facilitate the work of external or domestic agents that are striving to induce behavioral or ideational changes in an affected society.

The Political Effects of Foreign Aid

Most studies on foreign aid have looked at how this type of assistance has affected the state and its decisions. Significantly less attention has been given to how foreign donors can influence either civil society or governance. This study contributes to this
literature by revealing that foreign aid can affect the state, civic groups and the relationship between them.

Bilateral and multilateral donors helped strengthen civil society in Honduras both directly and indirectly. They channeled millions of dollars to NGOs and local governments in an effort to decentralize public decision-making and ensure that reconstruction assistance would be used more efficiently. This enabled some NGOs to strengthen their organizational capacity and take a more active political role. Donors also strengthened civil society indirectly by demanding that the Honduran state adopt steps to increase citizen participation, improve transparency and promote good governance. The prospect of such a political opening encouraged national-level civil society groups to increase their level of cooperation and activism and lobby the state for both political inclusion and reform. Together, this international and societal pressure changed enabled the development of a more participatory style of governance in Honduras which resulted in notable policy and institutional changes.

NGOs reinforced and in some cases replicated at the local level those effects that international donors were having on civil society at the national level. Development-oriented NGOs encouraged the organization of target groups and helped raise their political awareness. CARITAS and a handful of other NGOs went a step further by encouraging citizens to become more politically involved. Consequently, the NGO-inspired groups that were formed after Hurricane Mitch began to challenge both their municipal and local governments and play a more active role in politics. Some of these grass-roots organizations linked up to more politically active, national-level groups such
as INTERFOROS in an effort to increase further their numerical strength and influence on government.

The socio-political changes that arose at the national level as a result of both Mitch and foreign aid did not represent a dramatic or revolutionary break with the past. Rather, both of these exogenous variables tended to hasten processes that were already underway. Chapter three of this dissertation revealed that civil society had been developing, engaging the state and pressuring it to change its policies and institutions since the 1950’s. But it tended to adopt a confrontational approach to the state and had been unable to sustain its levels of political activism for long. Moments of intense protest and activity such as those that arose in the late 1960’s with the National Unity government and the late 1970’s with the transition to constitutional rule were often followed by periods of relative passivity. Although state repression, corruption and ideational differences among group members contributed to the fragmentation of civil society during the 1980’s, organized groups periodically strove to regain their organizational strength and influence public decision-making. In response to this continual although inconsistent civic activism, several governments took steps to consult citizen groups and reach a consensus with them on important policy matters during the 1990’s. This revealed that the viability of the state-centered and exclusionary style of governance that had characterized Honduran politics was beginning to come into question. However, few governance changes were achieved during this period. The spaces for citizen participation in government that were created were few and temporal in nature. In most cases, the citizen forums that were established during the early 1990’s were used by elites to pacify and coopt civil society rather than to increase their voice in government.
Initially, Flores began reversing these humble political achievements in response to Mitch. He centralized power through the creation of a small Reconstruction Cabinet, was hesitant to respond to civil society demands and eliminated many of the bureaucratic controls on executive power in order to make quick, policy decisions with little public consultation. But foreign donors and newly energized civil society groups pressured the government to halt this regressive trend. As a result, the Honduran state and civil society continued on a path of political change that both had initiated earlier in the decade—one in which the traditional style of governance was being replaced by a more open and participatory one.

Some of the institutional changes that donors helped achieve also had their origins in the past. Donors, for example, had been pressuring the Honduran government to privatize state-owned industries, reform the country’s judicial system, curtail political corruption and decentralize power since the late 1980’s. However, limited advances had been made on all of these fronts. The devastation wrought by Hurricane Mitch increased the Honduran government’s need for foreign assistance and, therefore, donor’s ability to induce change. This also increased the likelihood that the state would respond to civil society demands. This domestic and foreign pressure jointly propelled several institutional changes. The state initiated steps to privatize the public telecommunication and electric companies and offered private firms concessions to manage its port and airport facilities. The process for electing Supreme Court judges was changed, the Law of Municipalities was reformed to give local governments more power and the Tribunal Nacional de Elecciones was replaced by an entirely new and less politicized electoral agency. The government also made a more concerted effort to fight corruption.
Many of the institutional and governance changes that were initiated under the Flores administration did not end with President Ricardo Maduro’s assumption to office in 2002. Civil society groups pressured presidential candidates to sign an Accord on National Transformation for Human Development in 2001 just a few months before national elections were set to take place. Signatories to this agreement committed themselves to supporting the process of judicial reform, advancing decentralization, working to combat poverty and initiating a series of additional political changes.¹ The continued civic and international pressure to transform the country forced the Maduro administration to continue working with civil society. The Commission on the Modernization of the State, INTERFOROS, FONAC and the National Anti-Corruption Council remained active and continued to negotiate additional institutional and policy reforms. Clearly, the mere presence of these participatory spaces has not resulted in a dramatic improvement in the country’s democracy. The existing judicial, electoral and political party systems are still in need of reform and corruption remains a major political problem. But the fact that state-centered, political elites are willing to work with civil society and consider how best to improve the political system suggests that Honduras is continuing on a path towards a more participatory form of governance. This should contribute to the creation of a better and more legitimate democratic regime in the future.

Foreign donors’ successful dissemination of a development discourse also offers reason to be optimistic about the future of Honduras. Donor emphasis on the need to increase citizen participation, decentralize, improve governance and increase government transparency has penetrated a significant portion of Honduran society and not simply

been constrained to those bureaucrats who negotiate directly with foreign aid representatives. Although some theorists such as Risse and Sikkink\textsuperscript{2} have suggested that the use of a particular discourse can lead to normative changes among those who employ it, it is unclear whether such ideational shifts have occurred in Honduras. The field research for this dissertation was conducted so soon after Hurricane Mitch and the subsequent flood of foreign aid in the country that it was too early to determine whether such a normative change had begun to occur. However, what was clear was that key civil society groups had adopted this hegemonic language, used it to pressure the government for greater reform and begun judging political elites on the basis of it. All of this suggests that the dissemination of a development discourse by bilateral and multilateral donors may contribute to additional political changes in Honduras. Future research will have to determine whether this has in fact occurred.

Much of the recent literature on foreign aid has been very critical and pessimistic about aid’s ability to contribute positively to development. Easterly, for instance, has shown that there is no clear correlation between foreign aid and economic growth.\textsuperscript{3} In addition, several others have doubted that it may contribute to democracy. Alesina and Weder have shown that most foreign aid tends to be channeled to corrupt governments\textsuperscript{4} while Palmer, Wohlander and Morgan have argued that donors offer foreign assistance


for self-interested reasons. The research presented here suggests that we adopt a more sanguine view of foreign aid. Although self-interest may have motivated donors to channel reconstruction assistance to Honduras (as the case of Japan makes most clear), this aid was able to induce positive political transformations. But the changes that were observed are not easily quantifiable and do not represent dramatic breaks with the past. Rather, they denote a continuation of positive advances in democratic governance that had been initiated previously. So, although this research has found that foreign aid can contribute positively to political development, it highlights that these changes may proceed in slow, incremental and often indiscernible steps.

An academic pessimism has emerged among the NGO literature as well. Early research on this topic argued that NGOs could strengthen civil society and democracy. But more recent scholarship has questioned this assertion. Scholars have observed that some NGOs reproduce the paternalistic and clientelistic practices that permeate a society, privilege local elites, marginalize the poor in decision-making processes and promote regionalism. All of this limits how much NGOs can contribute to socio-political change or development. This dissertation does not deny that NGOs may have such negative effects. However, it cautions us not to reject earlier arguments about the positive effects

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of NGOs. The municipal case studies presented here revealed that non-governmental donors can strengthen civil society, enhance people’s political awareness and thus contribute to an improvement in both governance and democracy. Moreover, the case of San Marcos shows that NGOs do not always make a target community dependent on foreign, namely Northern donors, as several scholars have suggested. Clearly, the danger for this exists. But project beneficiaries can break out of this dependent cycle and establish sustainable, community-based groups and development organizations.

The Insights of Governance

The dissertation also makes a contribution to the budding literature on governance. Our focus on both the national and municipal level revealed that governance is not unfolding in a uniform or consistent manner throughout Honduras. Significant advances have been made at the national level to show that governance there is becoming more participatory and supportive of democracy. But municipal level governance lags far behind. Historically, few grass-roots organizations have engaged their municipal governments outside of traditional clientelist networks of association. This is because local governments have had little political power. What few decisions they have made have been limited and authoritarian in manner. But foreign donors’ demands for decentralization throughout the 1990’s has begun to change the strength and importance of municipal governments. These entities now have more resources and political power than ever before. Although they remain poor and weak when compared to the national government, the recent transfer of resources and decision-making power to the local level

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has not gone unnoticed by Honduran citizens. The increasing level of community organization that was spurred by Mitch and foreign NGOs together with the continued progress in decentralization has motivated citizens to dialogue with their municipal governments and demand greater participation in local, public decision-making. Although the level of communication and negotiation between civil society and the state is not as advanced at the municipal level as it is at the national one, recent events suggest that municipal level governance is beginning to experience a transformation.

The analysis presented here of different municipal sites also highlights that governance is unfolding unevenly between different regions of the country. Places such as Dolores Merendón show significantly lower levels of citizen organization and political activism than San Marcos or Sabá. It is likely that these regional variations were aggravated after Mitch by foreign donors and NGOs who offered significant assistance to some areas of the countries but neglected others. USAID, for example, funded a multi-million dollar municipal development program since 1999 whose goal was to improve the capacity, efficiency and participation of citizens in local government. But USAID only selected a few dozen of the largest and wealthiest municipalities in Honduras to participate in this program and charged a Central American NGO, the Fundación the Desarrollo Municipal (FUNDEMUN), with implementing it. Most likely, this foreign aid will help alter the style of governance in these target areas and make it more participatory. But it will also exacerbate the organizational and political differences between different municipalities in the country.

Our focus of governance also helps clarifies current understandings of democratization. At its most basic level, this theoretical approach emphasizes that the
more a state and society dialogue, the better the former can respond to the demands of the latter and the more likely both will be able to develop institutions that reflect their interests and desires. Yet shifts in governance do not occur over night. Change tends to proceed in slow and irregular steps. Sometimes, regimes or formal institutions change (as occurred in Honduras during its transition to constitutional rule) but old patterns of governance persist. Moreover, different patterns of governance may coexist within a nation-state. The dissonance or incompatibility that often emerges between democratic regimes and the styles of governance that sustains them can lead to a lack of legitimacy, political instability and to what Schmitter describes as the partial consolidation of democracy. The focus on governance thus highlights that political systems that have formal, democratic institutions but are characterized by undemocratic practices and political interactions may require democratic deepening in its attitudinal and behavioral dimensions in order to achieve consolidation. Such regimes, in other words, need to develop more open and participatory styles of governance in order for democracy to survive.

**Conclusion**

This research has sought to analyze the effects that both foreign aid and a disaster can have on governance. Although the conclusions presented here were based on a comparative analysis of these factors, it would have benefited from a cross national

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10 Linz and Stepan have argued that there is a constitutional, behavioral and attitudinal dimension to democratic consolidation. See Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, Southern America, and Post-Communist Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
study. However, no other country in Central America was as devastated by Hurricane Mitch nor received as much foreign aid after it as did Honduras. Moreover, the magnitude of both the disaster and aid that entered this small country made it an almost perfect social laboratory wherein one could compare and contrast the effects of our two independent variables. So, although the research focused on just one country, it was designed to be comparative in nature—to explore differences between the national and the local level as well as among different localities.

Much of the work in comparative politics tends to compare and contrast the political regimes of different countries as well as the factors that shape them. Those works that do consider subnational level politics tend to be based on large countries such as Russia, India, Brazil and Mexico. The underlying assumption in these works is that an intra-national, comparative analysis of these countries is acceptable because their constitutive states are large enough to constitute states in their own right. This work shows that significant intra-national variation exists even within a small country such as Honduras. This should caution future researchers not to make gross generalizations about a country, be it small or large, without taking into consideration the internal dynamics and historical diversity of such a place.
The conclusions presented in this dissertation are based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data obtained in Honduras from August 1999 through October 2000. This appendix will describe in some detail how these data were collected at both the national and subnational level.

The National Level

Much of the information presented in chapter 4 of this dissertation is based on surveys and interviews conducted with leaders of national level civil society groups. Their respective organizations were chosen in a purposive manner based on previous knowledge of their group’s activism and socio-political importance. All of the peak labor, peasant, indigenous and business organizations in the country were selected together with some of their constitutive member groups. The most active organizations within other sectors of Honduran civil society were chosen on the basis of their activism and notoriety. A total of thirty-eight civil society organizations were selected for study using this purposive sampling method. These represented:

6 Labor Unions 4 Special Interest/Intellectual Organizations
6 Peasant Organizations 3 Human Rights Organizations
3 Agricultural Organizations 3 Environmental Organizations
3 Indigenous Organizations 1 Women’s Organizations
3 Business Organizations 6 Honduran NGOs
The president, executive director or other such leader of these organizations was asked to participate in a face to face survey that lasted approximately 20 minutes. These individuals were then interviewed one to two months later. Five main questions served to guide the flow of these interviews. But interviewees were encouraged to express their ideas freely and discuss any topic of their choosing.

Surveys also were conducted with a stratified random sample of Honduras urban population. A Honduran-based survey company named FORUM was contracted to administer surveys to a sample of the population living in thirteen of the largest urban centers in Honduras during the month of February 2000. A total of 1220 people from these areas were selected to participate in the study. Since Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula were significantly larger than the other cities in the country, most of our urban sample was chosen from these two locations. Nearly 30% of those surveyed (360 individuals) lived in the capital while another 16% (or 200 people) resided in San Pedro Sula. The remaining eleven urban centers in the study—Puerto Cortés, El Progreso, La Ceiba, Tocoa, Choluteca, La Paz, Comayagua, Danlí, Juticalpa, Santa Barbara and Santa Rosa de Copán—each accounted for 5% (or 60 surveys) of our total urban response.

Survey participants were not selected randomly because there was no reliable data source accessible to us from which they could have been selected. In addition, there was a fear that a random sample would under represent a significant subpopulation of these cities, namely, the inhabitants of squatter settlements. A stratified, random sample was deemed the best means of obtaining the opinion of the majority of Honduras’ urban population: the poor. Seven percent of the selected sample lived in upper class neighborhoods, 16% came from middle class neighborhoods, 32% from lower class neighborhoods and 45%
from marginal neighborhoods. Women accounted for a little over half (or 56%) of respondents.

**The Municipal Level**

The information reported on the four municipal case studies was derived from in-depth interviews with key government officials and local, civil society leaders from each of these locations. In addition, a random sample of existing households was selected to participate in a survey. One adult from each of these households was asked to respond to our questionnaire. Ideally, a random sample of adult residents in each municipality should have been selected to participate in our study. Unfortunately, there were no reliable data on who or how many people resided in these areas. However, different government sources maintained some information on existing households in these areas. Whenever possible, these were used as the source from which to select a sample. The following will explain in greater detail how residents from each municipality were selected and interviewed.

**Survey Collection in Potrerillos**

The municipality of Potrerillos had no reliable data on the population residing in its territory. The last census had been taken in 1994, but the constant migration into and out of the area, especially after Mitch, made that data invalid. The local government estimated that 15,000 people inhabited its municipality. This population was too large for me to lift a census in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Fortunately, the local Health Center had current (1999-2000) household-level information on some of the neighborhoods in the Potrerillos. Their information listed the names of the head of each household, the number of adults and children living with them and whether they had letrines and potable water. The local Red Cross had a less detailed list of the families
living in the three shelter communities that had been established after Mitch. Although they did not record the total number of people living in the shelters, they did have the names of one adult representative from each family living in nylon tents. This revealed how many households were living in temporary shelters. The municipal government also had current household-level data on some of the urban neighborhoods in Potrerillos. Unlike the Health Center and the Red Cross, the municipality did not have a list of households which included the names of adult residents. Rather, they had cadastral maps which recorded the number of property lots in some urban neighborhoods, whether or not houses were located on them and the owner (not necessarily resident) of each property.

Unfortunately, the household-level data from the Health Center, municipal government and Red Cross did not account for ten neighborhoods in Potrerillos. Consequently, I contracted the president of the patronato (a local community leader) from each of these localities to compile basic population information on these neighborhoods. Essentially, I asked these individuals to list the total number of households in their neighborhoods and include the names of one adult representative from them. That way, I could have a household level list from these ten neighborhoods similar to the ones I had obtained from the Red Cross and the Health Center. Together, the information from these disparate sources let me know that there were a total of approximately 2860 households in Potrerillos.

A random sample of this population was selected based on the recommendations of Russell Bernard’s book, *Research Methods in Anthropology* which contained the following sample size formula adjusted for small populations:

$$\text{sample size} = \frac{X^2 \cdot NP(1-P)}{C^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)}$$
where

$X^2$ is the chi-square value for 1 degree of freedom at some desired probability level

N is the population size

P is the population parameter of a variable (best set to 0.5) and

C is the confidence interval one desires

In order to obtain a 95% probability sample, the $X^2$ was set to 3.841 and the confidence interval to 0.05. Applying the household population of Potrerillos (2860) to the formula above, a sample size of 339 was obtained.

$$\frac{(3.841)(2860)(0.25)}{(0.025)(2859) + (3.841)(.25)} = 339 \text{ sample size}$$

These 339 households were selected at random by assigning a number to each household in the cadastral maps and household lists that had been obtained. Using a random number table, 379 of the numbered households were selected as part of the sample. An alternative sample list was compiled in this same manner also so that if someone selected from the first list was not accessible, a replacement could be chosen from the second list.

Surveys were administered to the sampled population in person with the assistance of two research assistants from Potrerillos. Since the houses in Potrerillos (and the other three municipal cases) did not have precise addresses assigned to them, the names of the heads of households were used to locate survey participants. If the sample list indicated that someone in the house of Juan Pérez in Barrio Morazán had to be interviewed, we wandered around that neighborhood, asking people where Juan Pérez lived until we located his house. Once the house was found, however, we did not ask to speak to Juan
Perez, but rather, to an adult resident there. We tried alternating between male and female interviewees in order to maintain gender equity in our sample. If our sample list for the day included eight households, then we alternated between male and female adult residents so that by the end of the day we had spoken to half of each sex group. Our final sample gave us an almost equal number of male and female adults whose ages ranged between 18 and 80 with a mean age of 43.7.

The houses in the alternate sample list were used only when one of the ones from the primary sample list declined to participate in the study or simply could not be found. The alternate list was not used simply because someone in the primary list lived too far or was too old. If the primary list said we had to speak to an adult living in the house at the top of a hill (something which happened quite frequently), then we spoke to someone from that house. Alternately, if the primary list indicated we had to speak to an adult from X household and the only adult living there was a drunkard, then we spoke to that individual. (Interestingly, one of the individuals in the Potrerillos sample was a well known town drunk who lived by himself. His sister advised that he not be included in the study because he always was intoxicated. Fortunately, we were able to find him in one of his few sober moments and complete a survey with him.)

Survey Collection in San Marcos

Since household-level data was used as the basis from which to select the Portrerillos sample, a similar sample selection method had to be used in the other three municipalities under study. This was just as well since none of the other selected sites had census information on their inhabitants.1 Unlike Portrerillos, the Health Center in

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1 The last population census in Honduras had been gathered in 1988. Although some municipalities had conducted their own local-level census since that time, most of this information was outdated by the time of
San Marcos did not have any current data on the area’s population. In addition, none of the NGOs working there had precise information on the number of households located in the different communities in the area. Fortunately, the local government had just compiled a cadastral survey of the entire municipality with the technical and financial support of an Italian NGO, the Associazione per la Partecipazione all Sviluppo (APS, the Association for Participation in Development). This cadastral data revealed that there were 2016 households in San Marcos in 2000. This was used as the basis from which to select a household sample. The previously cited sample formula revealed that a sample of at least 322 houses had to be selected in order to obtain a 95% probability sample of households in the area with a 0.05 confidence interval. Each house in municipal cadastral records was assigned a number and then selected using a random number table. This same method was used to select an alternate sample list as well.

The San Marcos surveys were collected with the help of three research assistants. As in Potrerillos, we were not interested in speaking to the people whose names were on our sample list, especially since these were the names of people who owned the property, not of those who lived inside of it. So, if the sample list included the house of Juan Carlos Arita in Barrio El Centro, we searched for that property even though Juan Carlos Arita may have lived elsewhere. Once the home was found, we asked to speak to one adult living there. If a female adult was interviewed from the first house on the list, then a male adult was surveyed from the second house, and a female adult from the third house and so forth until the survey goal for the day was met. This gave us almost complete this research. The dearth of good data was a significant limitation not just for this research but also for all the other relief agencies working in Honduras after Mitch. Consequently the United Nations chose to fund a national-level census of the country in 2000. Unfortunately, much of this census information was still being gathered when this research was conducted and, therefore, was of no use.
gender parity in our sample of 331 residents. Respondents’ ages ranged from 18 to 93 with a mean age of 42.77 and a standard error of 0.84.

**Survey Collection in Dolores Merendón**

There was no current census information on the population of Dolores Merendón. However, APS had helped local government employees complete a cadastral survey of the entire municipality just a few months before beginning field research there. This cadastral data revealed that there were approximately 400 houses in Dolores. Using the sample size formula, it was determined that at least 196 houses here should be selected at random in order to obtain a 95% probability sample with a 0.05 confidence interval. Since the required sample size represented nearly half of the houses in Dolores Merendón, there was little need to select a sample list as had been done elsewhere. I simply chose to interview one adult from every other house in the area, alternating between male and female respondents. All the families we contacted agreed to participate in the study, so there was no need to devise an alternate sample. The surveys in Dolores were collected with the help of two of the research assistants that had worked with me in San Marcos. This helped keep any data collection errors between these two municipalities constant.

Unfortunately, the goal of surveying half the households in Dolores was never met. Only 179 surveys were collected in this municipality. We purposefully chose not to include one subset of houses in our research because we were informed that some of the families there were engaged in a family feud during the course of our data collection and periodically would fire gunshots at each other from their respective houses. We were advised not to approach this area in order to avoid being caught in any possible crossfire. Although we could not deduce exactly how many houses were located in this particular
settlement, I estimate there were about twenty of them. It is also possible that we failed to include some isolated houses in our research. Most of the houses in Dolores were dispersed among a mountainous terrain and often were difficult to access. Nevertheless, we invested a significant amount of time traveling by car when possible and on foot when not in order to collect a representative sample of the population. Although we visited the most remote settlements in the municipality, it is possible that we overlooked or failed to spot some houses that were located in areas hidden from sight. Despite these limitations, the sample that was collected on Dolores gives us a 90% probability of being representative of the population of households there.

**Survey Collection in Sabá**

Sabá had similar problems as Potrerillos in terms of its population data. There was no recent census of the area’s inhabitants. The public Health Center, unlike the one in Potrerillos, had been unable to collect even the most basic household level data on the local population after Mitch—something which severely limited their efforts to vaccinate residents and control the spread of diseases such as malaria. However, the municipal government did have an updated cadastral survey of most of the urban center of town. I chose to use this housing information to select the urban sample from the municipality. Although none of Sabá’s population was living in shelter communities when field research was conducted there, several new housing projects had been completed during the few months beforehand and had not yet been included in the municipal government’s cadastral survey. Therefore, a list of the total number of new houses that had been constructed in these areas and the names of the heads of each household was obtained from the individual institutions (i.e., CARE, the Catholic Church, etc.) that had financed
these projects. The data obtained from these institutions and the municipal government was used to determine the general household population of urban Sabá.

Unfortunately, no household-level data was available on the rural communities in this municipality. In order to determine how many households were situated there, I was forced to lift my own census of these areas. As I had done in Potrerillos, I hired either the president of the patronato or the director of the Comité de Desarrollo Local (CODEL) from each rural settlement to gather basic census information on their respective neighborhoods. I chose not to gather this census data myself because I feared that, not being very familiar with the layout of these communities, I might fail to find and thus include isolated or hard to find houses in my census. Since local leaders knew every family in their community and how best to find them, I knew they would be able to collect a more accurate census of their area. The rural census data that was gathered together with the information that was obtained from the municipal government and NGOs revealed that there were approximately 4000 houses in Sabá. Using the small sample size formula previously described, it was determined that at least 350 households from Sabá has to be selected in order to obtain a 95% probability sample with a 0.05 confidence interval.

Using the cadastral maps and lists of households that had been obtained, each house in Sabá was assigned a number. Then 351 of these were selected with a random number table. The same procedure was used to create an alternate sample list. Three residents from Sabá were hired and trained to help administer face to face surveys. As in

2 Rural communities in Honduras tend to have a disorganized layout. Houses are not aligned in neat rows nor are they necessarily located near roads or foot paths. Instead, they tend to be dispersed throughout a variable terrain. Families will often purposefully choose to build a house in a hard to find area in order to maintain some degree of privacy from the rest of the community.
Potrerillos and San Marcos, the sample list served only as a guide to find a particular house. Once found, we asked to speak to a female or male adult member of the family in alternating fashion. This gave us a sample divided perfectly along gender lines. The ages of our Sabá sample’s ranged from 18 to 88 and had a mean of 41.36.
APPENDIX B
SAMPLE CITIZEN SURVEY

Fecha __________________    Encuestador ___________________
Municipio __________________    Barrio o Aldea ___________________

1. ¿Cuál es su edad? ______________  2. ¿Cuál es su sexo? _____________
   _____ 3. ¿Cuál es su estado civil?
   Soltera/o   d) Viudo/a
   Casada/o   e) No Contesta
   Unión libre

   _____ 4. ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de educación formal que usted ha completado?
   alguna educación primaria    e) alguna educación universitaria
   completo la primaria    f) completo una educación universitaria
   alguna educación secundaria    g) No recibió educación formal
   completo la secundaria    h) No Contesta

5. ¿Usted vivía en este municipio antes del Huracán Mitch?     Si /      No

6. ¿Cómo fueron afectados usted y su familia por el Huracán Mitch?
   _____ Perdieron algunos cultivos   _____ Se murieron algunos animales
   _____ Perdieron todos los cultivos   _____ Se murieron todos sus animales
   _____ Se hirieron miembros de su familia   _____ Se daño su casa
   _____ Murieron miembros de su familia   _____ Perdió toda su casa
   _____ No fuimos afectados   _____ Otro

7. ¿Cuántos cuartos tenía la casa donde usted vivía antes de Mitch? ___________

   _____ 8. ¿Cuál era el material predominante en el piso de esa casa?
   Tierra   d) Barro   g) No Recuerda
   Madera   e) Loza    h) No Contesta
   Cemento   f) Otro _______________

   _____ 9. ¿Cuál era el material predominante en las paredes de esa casa?
   Ladrillo   d) Adobe    g) No Recuerda
   Madera    e) Vara o cana    h) No Contesta
   Cemento   f) Deshechos    i) Otro _______________
10. Ustedes eran propietarios de esa casa o la rentaban?  **Propietario / Rentaban**

11. ¿Todavía vive usted en la misma casa donde vivía antes de Mitch?
   a) Sí  **(salte al 18)**
   b) No
   c) Depende (explique) _______________________
   d) No Contesta

12. ¿Cuántos cuartos tiene la casa donde usted vive ahora? _________

13. ¿Cuál es el material predominante en el piso de esta casa?
   a) Tierra  d) Barro  g) No Recuerda
   b) Madera  e) Loza  h) No Contesta
   c) Cemento  f) Otro _______________

14. ¿Cuál es el material predominante en las paredes de esta casa?
   a) Ladrillo  d) Adobe  g) No Recuerda
   b) Madera  e) Vara o cana  h) No Contesta
   c) Cemento  f) Deshechos  i) Otro ______________

15. Ustedes son propietarios de esta casa o la rentan? ___________

16. ¿Usted o su esposo/a tienen una finca?
   a) sí (¿Cuántas hectáreas tiene su finca? ___________________)
   b) no
   c) no sabe
   d) no contesta

17. ¿Cómo de interesado esta usted en asuntos políticos—muy interesado, algo interesado, un poco interesado, no interesado, o no interesado en lo absoluto?
   a) Muy interesado  d) No interesado
   b) Algo interesado  e) No interesado en lo absoluto
   c) Un poco interesado  f) No Contesta

18a. Normalmente, ¿cómo obtiene usted información sobre asuntos políticos?
   ______ Escuchando la radio  ______ Viendo televisión
   ______ Leyendo el periódico  ______ Leyendo revistas
   ______ Otras personas me cuentan  ______ Otra Manera

18b. ¿Qué tanta información recibe usted sobre la política del país?
   a) Bastante  b) Alguna  c) Poca  e) Ninguna  f) No Contesta

19. ¿Cómo calificaría el nivel de organización hoy en día en su comunidad?
   a) Activa  d) No hay organización en mi municipalidad
   b) Mediana  e) No sabe
   c) Débil  f) No Contesta
20. Y antes de Mitch, ¿cómo era el nivel de organización en su comunidad?
   a) Activa
   b) Mediana
   c) Débil
   d) No había organización en mi municipalidad
   e) No sabe
   f) No Contesta

21. Por favor dígame si alguna de las siguientes organizaciones existe en su municipio.
   a) Patronato
   b) Comité de Desarrollo Comunitario (CODECO)
   c) Comité de Desarrollo Municipal (CODEM)
   d) Junta Local de Agua
   e) Organización Campesina (¿Cuáles? ________________________)
   f) Asociación Agrícola (¿Cuántas? _____)
   g) Cooperativa (¿Cuántas? _____)
   h) Asociación de Obreros (¿Cuáles? ________________________)
   i) Sindicatos (¿Cuáles? ________________________)
   j) Club de Amas de Casa
   k) Pequeñas Iglesias (o Comunidades Eclesiales de Base)
   l) Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos
   m) Comité de Derechos del Niño
   n) Consejo Local del Partido Liberal
   o) Consejo Local del Partido Nacional
   p) Consejo Local del PINU
   q) Consejo Local del Partido Democracia Cristiana
   r) Consejo Local del Partido Unidad Democrática
   s) Otro ________________________

22. ¿Se han organizado algunos nuevos grupos en su comunidad o municipio después de Mitch?
   a) Si
   b) No (salte a la 24)
   c) No Sabe (salte a la 24)
   d) No Contesta (salte a la 24)

23. ¿Cuáles? __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________

24. ¿Desaparecieron algunos grupos en su comunidad o municipio después de Mitch?
   a) Si
   b) No (salte a la 26)
   c) No Sabe (salte a la 26)
   d) No Contesta (salte a la 26)

25. ¿Cuáles? __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
26. ¿Es usted ahora miembro de alguna organización o iglesia de su comunidad?
   a) Sí                                      c) No Sabe (salte a la 28)
   b) No (salte a la 28)                      d) No Contesta (salte a la 28)

27. ¿De cuáles?
   _________________________________  ¿Desde cuándo?
   _________________________________
   _________________________________

28. ¿Usted dejó de ser miembro de alguna organización o iglesia después de Mitch?
   a) Sí                                      c) No Sabe (salte a la 30)
   b) No (salte a la 30)                     d) No Contesta (salte a la 30)

29. ¿De qué grupo(s) dejó de ser miembro?
   _________________________________  ¿Desde cuándo?
   _________________________________
   _________________________________

30. ¿Es fácil o difícil trabajar con otras personas en su comunidad para resolver problemas?
   a) Fácil                                  d) No Sabe
   b) Difícil                               e) No Contesta
   c) Depende

31. En comparación a antes de Mitch, ¿cuán fácil es trabajar con otras personas en su comunidad para resolver problemas—igual, menos o más fácil?
   a) Igual de fácil                        d) No Sabe
   b) Menos fácil                           e) No Contesta
   c) Más fácil                            f) Depende _________________________________

Ahora le quiero hacer unas preguntas que me ayudaran entender su relación con el gobierno y como esa relación ha sido afectada por Mitch.

G1. ¿Usted a participado en alguna cabildo abierto después de Mitch?
   a) Sí                                      b) No (salte a la G3)    c) No Contesta (salte a la G3)

G2. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes cosas pudo hacer usted en el cabildo abierto?
   ________ Opinar  ________ Votar
   ________ Discutir  ________ Tomar decisiones
   ________ Hacer propuestas  ________ Implementar propuestas
G3. Y antes de Mitch, ¿participo usted alguna vez en un cabildo abierto?
   a) Si  b) No (salte a la G5)  c) No Contesta (salte a la G5)

G4. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes cosas pudo hacer usted en el cabildo abierto?
   __________ Opinar  __________ Votar
   __________ Discutir  __________ Tomar decisiones
   __________ Hacer propuestas  __________ Implementar propuestas

G5. ¿Cuánto sabe usted de lo que esta ocurriendo actualmente en el CODEM?
   a) Bastante  b) Muy Poco  c) No Sabe lo que es un CODEM  d) No Contesta

G6. ¿Usted a participado en alguna reunión del CODEM después de Mitch?
   a) Si  b) No (salte a la G8)  c) No Contesta (salte a la G8)

G7. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes cosas pudo hacer usted en la reunión?
   __________ Opinar  __________ Votar
   __________ Discutir  __________ Tomar decisiones
   __________ Hacer propuestas  __________ Implementar proyectos

G8. Y antes de Mitch, ¿participo usted alguna vez en una reunión del CODEM?
   a) Si  b) No (salte a la G10)  c) No Contesta (salte a la G10)

G9. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes cosas pudo hacer usted en la reunión?
   __________ Opinar  __________ Votar
   __________ Discutir  __________ Tomar decisiones
   __________ Hacer propuestas  __________ Implementar proyectos

G10. ¿En cuántas de las últimas cuatro elecciones ha votado usted? __________

G11. ¿Espera votar en las próximas elecciones?
   a) Si  b) No  (¿Por qué no? ____________________________________________)
   c) No Sabe  d) No Contesta

G12. Desde el Huracán Mitch hasta ahora, ¿se ha comunicado usted con
alguien en el gobierno para hablarles de un problema, necesidad o preocupación?
   a) Si  b) No (salte a la G19)  c) No Recuerda (salte a la G19)
   d) No Contesta (salte a la G19)

G13. ¿Con quién (o quienes) se ha comunicado usted? ____________________
     _______________________________________________________________
G14. ¿Cómo se ha comunicado con esta(s) persona(s)?
   _____ Lo llamo por teléfono (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Lo visito personalmente a su oficina (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Lo visito personalmente a su casa (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ El/ella vino a mi comunidad (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Le mando una carta (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Otra manera ________________________________________________

G15. ¿Le fue difícil comunicarse con esta(s) persona(s)?
   a) Si                       d. No Sabe (skip to G17)
   b) No (skip to G17)        e. No Contesta (skip to G17)
   c) Depende (explique) ______________________________________________

G16. Si es que sí, ¿por qué? ________________________________

______________________________

G17. ¿Cuánta atención le presitaron?
   a) Bastante atención          e. Lo ignoraron
   b) Alguna atención            f. No Sabe
   c) Poca atención              g. No Contesta
   d) Depende (explique) ______________________________________________

G18. ¿Al final, le ayudaron con su necesidad o problema?  
   Si / No ___________________

G19. Y en los cinco años antes del Huracán Mitch, ¿se comunicó usted con alguien en el gobierno para hablarles de un problema, necesidad o preocupación?  
   a) Si                       d. No Recuerda (salte a la G26)
   b) No (salte a la G26)      e. No Contestá (salte a la G26)

G20. ¿Con quién (o quienes) se comunicó usted? ________________________________

G21. ¿Cómo se comunicó con esta(s) persona(s)?
   _____ Lo llamo por teléfono (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Lo visito personalmente a su oficina (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Lo visito personalmente a su casa (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ El/ella vino a mi comunidad (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Le mando una carta (¿Cuántas veces? __________)  
   _____ Otra manera (Especifique) ________________________________________
G22. ¿Le fue difícil comunicarse con esta(s) persona(s)?
   a) Si    d. No Sabe (skip to G24)
   b) No (skip to G24)   e. No Contesta (skip to G24)
   c) Depende (explique) ____________________________________________

G23. Si es que sí, ¿por qué? ________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

G24. ¿Cuánta atención le prestaron?
   a) Bastante atención       e. Lo ignoraron
   b) Alguna atención         f. No Sabe
   c) Poca atención           g. No Contesta
   d) Depende (explique) __________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

G25. ¿Al final, le ayudaron con su necesidad o problema?   Si / No

G26. Desde el Huracán Mitch hasta ahora, ¿el gobierno ha considerado una ley o procedimiento que usted ha considerado injusto?
   a) Si    d. No Sabe (skip to G30)
   b) No (skip to G30)   e. No Contesta (skip to G30)
   c) Depende (explique) __________________________________________

G27. Si es que sí, ¿qué ley o procedimiento ha considerado usted injusto? _______
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

G28. ¿Ha hecho usted algo para afectar las decisiones del gobierno sobre esta ley o procedimiento?
   a) Si    d. No Sabe (salte a la G30)
   b) No e No Contesta (salte a la G30)
   c) Depende (explique) __________________________________________

G29. Si es que sí, ¿qué ha hecho usted? Si es que no, ¿por qué no ha hecho nada?________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

G30. Y en los cinco años antes del Huracán Mitch, ¿el gobierno alguna vez considero una ley o procedimiento que usted considero injusto?
   a) Si    d. No Sabe (skip to G25)
   b) No (skip to G25)   e. No Contesta (skip to G25)
   c) Depende (explique) __________________________________________
G31. Si es que sí, ¿qué ley o procedimiento ha considerado usted injusto? _______
_________________________________________________________________

G32. ¿Hizo usted algo para afectar las decisiones del gobierno sobre esto?  
Si d No Sabe (salte a la B1)
No e. No Contesta (salte a la B1)
Depende (explique) __________________________
_________________________________________________________________

G33. Si es que sí, ¿qué hizo usted? Si es que no, ¿por qué no hizo usted nada? __________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

B1. ¿Cuánta influencia cree que personas como usted tienen sobre el gobierno—bastante, alguna, poca, o ninguna influencia?
  a) a. Bastante influencia e. Ninguna influencia
  b) b. Alguna influencia f. No Sabe
  c) Poca influencia g. No Contesta
  d) Depende (explique) __________________________

B2. ¿Cree que después del Huracán Mitch personas como usted han tenido la misma, menos o más influencia sobre el gobierno que antes?
  a) a. Igual e. No Sabe
  b) b. Menos f. No Contesta
  c) Mas
  d) Depende (explique)_______________________________

Ahora le voy a leer una lista de cosas que las personas pueden hacer para lograr sus objetivos políticos. Por favor dígame cuanto usted aprobaría de estas acciones.

N7. Si alguien que usted conoce participara en una marcha o protesta pública ahora, demandando que el gobierno nacional cambie o no implemente una ley, ¿en qué grado aprobaría usted esta acción?
aprobaría aprobaría aprobaría desaprobaría desaprobaría desaprobaría
bastante un poco un poco desaprobable bastante
N8. Si alguien que usted conoce hubiera hecho esto antes de Mitch, ¿a qué grado hubiera aprobado usted de esta acción?

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N9. Si alguien que usted conoce trabajara en una campaña política para las próximas elecciones, ¿en qué grado aprobaría usted esta acción?

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N10. Si alguien que usted conoce hubiera hecho esto antes de Mitch, ¿en qué grado hubiera aprobado usted esta acción?

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N11. Si la gente de su departamento le escribiera una carta a alguien en el gobierno nacional ahora pidiéndole ayuda, ¿a qué grado aprobaría usted de esta acción?

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<td>desaprobaría</td>
<td>desaprobaría</td>
<td>bastante</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N12. Si la gente de su departamento hubiera hecho esto antes de Mitch, ¿en qué grado hubiera aprobado usted esta acción?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aprobaría</th>
<th>aprobaría</th>
<th>aprobaría</th>
<th>desaprobaría</th>
<th>desaprobaría</th>
<th>desaprobaría</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bastante</td>
<td>un poco</td>
<td>un poco</td>
<td>desaprobaría</td>
<td>desaprobaría</td>
<td>bastante</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ahora le quiero hacer unas preguntas sobre sus opiniones.**

L1. ¿Qué grado de orgullo tiene usted de vivir en este sistema político?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ningún orgullo</td>
<td>bastante orgullo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

L2. ¿A qué grado cree usted que los derechos básicos de todos los Hondureños están protegidos por el sistema político de este país?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no están protegidos</td>
<td>están bien protegidos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L3. ¿A qué grado cree usted que las cortes en Honduras garantizan un juicio justo?

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<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no lo garantizan</td>
<td>lo garantizan bastante</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
L4. ¿A qué grado cree usted que este sistema de gobierno es el mejor posible?
0 1 2 3 4 5 6
no lo es el mejor sistema

L5. ¿A qué grado cree que usted debiera de apoyar este sistema de gobierno?
0 1 2 3 4 5 6
no lo debo apoyar bastante

L6. ¿A qué grado cree usted que los Hondureños están bien representados en este sistema político?
0 1 2 3 4 5 6
no lo están bien representados

_____ N1. ¿Si un político le ayudara conseguir un trabajo ahora, ¿cuán obligado/a se sentiría usted de votar por el/ella en un futuro?
 a) Bien obligado f) No Sabe
 b) Algo obligado g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado
 e) No obligado en lo absoluto

_____ N2. ¿Si un político le hubiera ayudado conseguir un trabajo antes de Mitch, ¿cuán obligado/a se hubiera sentido usted de votar por el/ella o su partido?
 a) Bien obligado f) No Sabe
 b) Algo obligado g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado
 e) No obligado en lo absoluto

_____ N3. ¿Si un político le ayudara a su municipalidad construir una carretera, un puente o una escuela ahora, ¿cuán obligado/a se sentiría usted de ofrecerle su apoyo político en un futuro?
 a) Bien obligado f) No Sabe
 b) Algo obligado g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado
 e) No obligado en lo absoluto
N4. ¿Si un político le hubiera ayudado a su municipalidad construir una carretera, un puente o una escuela antes de Mitch, ¿cuán obligado/a se hubiera sentido usted de ofrecerle su apoyo político en un futuro?

a) Bien obligado  f) No Sabe
b) Algo obligado  g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado  h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado  __________________________________________
e) No obligado en lo absoluto

N5. Si usted votara por un partido o candidato político ahora, ¿cuán obligado de ayudarle a usted o su municipio en un futuro esperaría usted que estuviera esa persona o partido?

a) Bien obligado  f) No Sabe
b) Algo obligado  g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado  h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado  __________________________________________
e) No obligado en lo absoluto

N6. Si usted hubiera votado por un partido o candidato político antes de Mitch, ¿cuán obligado de ayudarle a usted o su municipio hubiera esperado usted que estuviera esa persona o partido?

a) Bien obligado  f) No Sabe
b) Algo obligado  g) No Contesta
c) Un poco obligado  h) Depende ________________________________
d) No obligado  __________________________________________
e) No obligado en lo absoluto

Finalmente, le voy a leer una lista de frases. Por favor dígame cuán de acuerdo esta usted con lo que ellas dicen.

N13. Si yo le pido a mi diputado o alcalde que me ayude con una necesidad, el debe hacer todo lo posible para ayudarme, aun si yo no soy miembro/a de su partido político.

muy de acuerdo de un poco en en muy en
acuerdo acuerdo acuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N14. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de un poco en en muy en
acuerdo acuerdo acuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N. El gobierno central entiende las necesidades del pueblo Hondureño mejor que los gobiernos municipales.

muy de acuerdo de un poco en en muy en
acuerdo acuerdo acuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo
N. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N15. Todos los Hondureños, incluyendo las mujeres y los grupos indígenas, deben tener los mismos derechos bajo la ley.

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N16. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N17. Las personas que tienen a un familiar, compadre o buen amigo en la política deben recibir mas ayuda del gobierno que otras personas.

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N18. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N19. Los gobiernos municipales pueden promover el desarrollo de sus comunidades mejor que el gobierno central.

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N20. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N21. Las personas que trabajan en campañas políticas deben recibir empleo en el gobierno si su partido gana las elecciones.

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo
N22. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo en desacuerdo muy en desacuerdo

N23. El gobierno central le debe transferir más dinero y poder a los gobiernos municipales.

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo

N24. Y antes de Mitch, ¿Cuán de acuerdo hubiese estado usted con esta oración?

muy de acuerdo de acuerdo un poco de acuerdo un poco en desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo desacuerdo
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vilma Elisa Fuentes was born in Miami, Florida on February 3, 1971 to a Cuban father and a Honduran mother. She was raised in Miami where she developed an acute awareness of and pride in her Latin American background. As a child, Vilma traveled frequently to Honduras and came to see this as her second home. Her exposure to this country led her to question at an early age why some areas of the world suffer from such extreme poverty and socio-political turmoil while others do not. Her travel experiences together with her cultural heritage encouraged her to deepen her knowledge of Latin American politics and development.

Vilma graduated with a B.A. in English and a minor in International Relations in 1992 from Florida International University. She received a Certificate in Latin American Studies the following year and an M.A. in International Studies in 1997 from this same institution. Her master’s thesis analyzed the political causes of deforestation in Honduras. While still working on this research, Vilma enrolled in a doctoral program in political science at the University of Florida where she specialized in comparative politics with an emphasis on Latin America. She graduated with a Ph.D. in the Spring of 2003.

Vilma married José Manuel Fuentes, a Spanish and Puerto Rican descendant, while at the University of Florida. She gave birth to her first child, Natalia Elisa, while writing her dissertation. Vilma hopes to dedicate the rest of her life to teaching others about Latin America and promoting the human development of this region.