

*Repression, Participation and Democratic Norms in Urban Central America**

John A. Booth, *University of North Texas*
Patricia Bayer Richard, *Ohio University*

Theory: Few studies have examined political repression's effects upon individual behavior and attitudes. We theorize that regimes use repression to constrain political behavior and values so as to limit demands and opposition. We therefore expect intense repression to reduce participation and support for democracy.

Hypotheses: Using six Central American countries for a most-similar systems test, we hypothesize that, other factors held constant, both 1) citizens perceiving more repression and 2) citizens of repressive regimes will report less political participation and lower support for democratic norms.

Methods: Using early 1990s public opinion data from six urban Central American samples, we employ multiple regression to examine how perceived repression and systemic repression affect citizens' participation and support for democratic norms. Also analyzed are individual demographic, resource and attitudinal items, and systemic measures of regime stability, and economic development.

Results: More intense regime repression markedly reduces both citizen activity and support for democracy in Central America. Perceived repression has no impact upon participation and very little impact upon democratic norms.

"People in an environment of diffuse terror learn instinctively what one may say and do and what it is safer to avoid"

(Dallin and Breslauer 1970, 124).

Regimes and their supporters employ political repression for simple reasons—to manage, reduce, or suppress the activities of their opponents, or to shape or limit the level and nature of citizens' demands upon the regime and state. Thus by and large repression is instrumental in that it

*This is a revised version of a paper presented at the XIX International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, September 28–30, 1995. Our thanks to Neal Tate, Steve Poe, three anonymous *AJPS* reviewers and the journal's editor for their comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript. Persons who wish to obtain data and documentation for replication purposes or collaborative research should contact John Booth. All data are embargoed for two years from date of publication of this article; certain national subsamples may be embargoed for longer periods pending first use by collaborators completing dissertations.

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 40, No. 4, November 1996, Pp. 1205–1232
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seeks to defend the power, perquisites, and resources of rulers and their allies from pressures from other elites and from mass publics.¹

Early political repression research was largely descriptive and historical, concentrating upon its origin, development, roles, relationship to authoritarianism, and effects upon institutions and social forces.² Scholars have also extensively examined the complex links between repression and political conflict (e.g., Gurr 1970; Gurr and Harf 1994; Lichbach 1995; Tilly 1978). Poe and Tate (1994) document the rapid growth of the study of repression *per se*, especially research on the human rights performance of regimes.³ Another area of inquiry includes studies of repression and its relation to opposition behavior, some of them theoretical or descriptive (Gurr 1986; Lichbach 1995; Mason and Krane 1989) and some of them quantitative (Duff and McCamant 1976; King 1993; Singh 1991). Other research explores how economic development levels, ideology, and interests shape human rights performance (e.g., Barsh 1993, 87–90; Petras and Morley 1986; Pion-Berlin 1989).

Despite the extensive investigation of repression, little systematic scholarly attention has yet been paid to the effects of repression by regimes upon the attitudes and behavior of individuals.⁴ Despite wrenching reports and testimonies of victims of human rights abuse and human rights investigations,⁵ little is known about its larger political effects. What impact, if any, does repression have upon the political culture and participation of

¹Duff and McCamant (1976, 24–5) define repression as “the use of governmental coercion to control or eliminate actual or potential political opposition.” Poe and Tate (1994, 5) define repression as “coercive activities on the part of the government designed to induce compliance in others. Examples . . . include murder, torture, disappearance, and imprisonment of persons for their political views.” We employ the term repression in this spirit, which is consistent with its usage elsewhere (e.g., Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón 1992; Dallin and Breslauer 1970; Fagen 1992; Pion-Berlin 1989; Stohl and Lopez 1984, 1986, 1988a).

²Even for Latin America alone, this literature is too massive to cite. Good general bibliographies may be found in Lichbach (1995) and Mason and Krane (1989). Latin America-oriented bibliographies may be found in Collier (1979, 405–43) and Loveman and Davies (1989).

³One branch of this literature treats repression as an independent variable shaping public policy (e.g., Poe 1990, 1991). Another treats regime repression as a dependent variable, and seeks to explain variations in human rights abuse and repression (e.g., Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón 1992; Gastil 1989; Petras and Morley 1986; Poe and Tate 1994; Stohl and Lopez 1984, 1986, 1988b).

⁴Promising exceptions, but still not systematic enquiries, include the recent edited volume by Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón (1992), including an excellent chapter by Garretón (1992).

⁵Two powerful testimonies are Timerman (1981) and Menchu (1984); an investigation of repression is exemplified by Argentina’s Comisión Nacional (1986) on that nation’s “dirty war.”

individual citizens? How do citizens respond or adapt to widespread regime violations of human rights? We employ recent public opinion data on samples of urban Central Americans to try to answer some of these questions.

Repression and Democracy in Latin America

Political repression is widely and rightly viewed as central to the Latin American political experience (Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón 1992; Duff and McCamant 1976; Pion-Berlin 1989; Stohl and Lopez 1984, 1986). The roots of modern elite authoritarianism and political repression in the region have been traced to Iberian Catholicism, feudalism, bureaucratic centralism, and the reconquest, as well as hierarchical indigenous institutions and culture (Dealy 1974; Fitzgibbon and Fernandez 1981; Rouquié 1987, 17–38; Wiarda 1990, 3–30). Such factors have been reinforced by the emergence of the region's militaries as central national political institutions, rectors of national stability, guarantors of the labor supply, and managers of national economic development (Loveman 1989; McClintock 1985a, 1985b; O'Donnell 1973; Petras and Morley 1986; Remmer 1991). Despite countervailing cultural norms favoring democracy and constitutionalism and periodic regionwide cycles of democratization (Huntington 1991; Seligson 1987), many scholars note that Latin American institutional authoritarianism and repression persist and often prevail (Wiarda 1990, 1992a, 1992b).

How is such political repression related to the region's prospects for democratization? Contending answers to this question have been formulated by participants in a current debate over political culture and democratization. Pessimists argue that a political culture of mass authoritarianism undergirds and sustains institutional repression in Latin America (Dealy 1974; Fitzgibbon and Fernandez 1981; Wiarda 1992c). One school of political culture theorists posits that the development of widespread norms of democracy among citizens must precede the development of institutional democracy.⁶ Almond and Verba (1963), for instance, contended that a "civic culture" is requisite for pluralist democracy. Building upon their work, Inglehart (1990) theorizes that the historical development of a political culture of support for democratic norms is essential for systemic democratization. Such culturist arguments suggest that Latin America, with its authoritarian traditions, poverty, and Catholic heritage, is unlikely to de-

⁶Diamond (1993a, 1993b) provides a valuable review of the literature on democratization and the role of political culture in the process. He notes that one approach to democratization (Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992; Dahl 1971; Lijphart 1977; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Rustow 1970) assumes that elites and elite culture are critically important but largely ignores mass culture.

velop a political culture of support for democracy. By implication, Latin America appears doomed to languish in repression and institutional authoritarianism.

An alternative view sees historical influences, institutional socialization, decisions and actions of leaders, social and economic change, and international diffusion as sources of relatively rapid shifts of political culture. Diamond (1993a, 423), for example, argues that all of these can promote democratic norms in developing nations, and concludes that "democratic culture is certainly not a precondition for the initiation of democracy." Along these lines, Seligson and Booth (1993) and Booth and Seligson (1984, 1993) have reported in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua levels of support for democratic norms sharply higher than predicted by culturist theories. This emerging empirical record suggests that, rather than mass culture determining regime type, the causality in some cases runs the other way: sociohistorical experiences and regime characteristics powerfully shape political culture, and may change it rather quickly.

We pursue this line of inquiry by asking how political repression at the polity level may affect political participation and support for democratic liberties among urban Central Americans. In so doing we subject to empirical scrutiny Inglehart's (1990) theory that both diffuse support and interpersonal trust are prerequisites for the development of democratic norms. Institutional/contextual traits at the societal level have been shown to exercise powerful constraints upon the voting behavior of individuals (Jackman 1987; Powell 1986), and we expect similar contextual effects to shape several other types of participation and political culture.

The Central American Study

The six countries of the Central American isthmus share many similarities in size, historical experience, economics, general social culture, and geopolitical environment. They thus provide an ideal setting for a most-similar-systems analysis. Their similarities reduce the number of possible confounding factors that might impinge upon an analysis of political participation and democratic attitudes. There are, nevertheless, pronounced differences among them in recent decades in their regime types and the levels of repression (Anderson 1982; Booth and Walker 1993; Dunkerley 1988). We have previously reported striking cross-national differences in levels of political participation and support for democratic liberties among urban Central Americans (Booth and Richard 1994) that appear to stem from differences in levels of political repression. Here we pursue further the question of how regime type and national historical experience may shape participation and support for democracy.

We measure repression in Central America both as a social structural

phenomenon (that is, a systemic constraint upon individuals at the level of the polity) and at the cognitive level (as perceived by citizens).⁷ Because we have data on a number of countries, we construct an index of political repression by the regime, based on the following rationale: repression is both a contemporary and a historical phenomenon within a polity. Assuming that the impact upon individuals of past regime repression will decay slowly even after actual repression may have declined, we include a historical component in our index (estimated intensity of regime repression over the decade before each national survey—roughly the 1980s; scores range from 1 for very low repression to 5 for very high). This epoch saw protracted and violent political turmoil in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.⁸ Since the immediate context is also of critical importance, however, we also estimate the regime repression level within each nation at the survey date (the same 1–5 intensity scale is employed). The two scores for each country are averaged. The resulting combined measure (range 1.0–5.0) provides a repression score for each country that is assigned to each respondent according to nation of residence.⁹

⁷This in part follows Barsh (1993), who calls for better measures of human rights/repression by incorporating subjective measures along with Delphic measures. Here we employ both types of measures, but use them separately in order not to lose the individual level variance of the perceptual measure.

⁸The dramatic increase in scholarship on Central America in the 1980s has provided considerable impressionistic evidence on levels and types of repression in the region. For instance, see Torres Rivas (1981), Anderson (1982), McClintock (1985a, 1985b), Petras and Morley (1986), Dunkerley (1988), Booth and Seligson (1989), Loveman and Davies (1989), and Booth and Walker (1993). This body of scholarly work, plus human rights and journalistic observations, provide the basis for the authors' Delphic (expert observer's) estimates.

⁹We employed two rough validity checks for our Delphic measure of regime repression. First, we converted Duff and McCamant's (1976, 39) repression scores for Central America, based upon event data for 1950–1970, into a scale ranging from 1.0 to 5.0 (see below). While much has changed in Central America since Duff and McCamant measured repression, the ordinal ranking of these six nations on the trait is identical for their measure and for ours, despite their different construction.

Second, Poe has constructed a measure of human rights performance/repression that is the arithmetic mean of three Delphic human rights scores derived from Amnesty International, the U.S. Department of State annual human rights report, and Freedom House data. We have converted the Central American nation scores into an index ranging from 1.0 to 5.0 for comparison purposes. (Our thanks to Steve Poe and Jim Meernik for these data.) The country rank orderings of our measure and Poe's are similar, with Costa Rica lowest and Guatemala and El Salvador highest. There are two main differences between our scores and the Poe index: the rank-order of Panama and Honduras is reversed, and Panama, Honduras, and Nicaragua have lower repression scores in our index. Both differences, we believe, stem from the Poe index's not taking into account changes due to time. The end of conflict and installation of civilian regimes in Nicaragua and Panama in 1989 and 1990 are not reflected in the Poe measure. We believe that the Poe index, those differences taken into consideration, also supports the face validity of our measure.

At the individual level, our survey asked respondents to evaluate whether they believed the amount of violence in their society to be low, medium or high.¹⁰ We employ this variable as an individual cognitive measure of repression, expecting that those who perceived high levels of violence in their societies might limit their political activities or have different attitudes about democracy than those who manifest less awareness of violence.¹¹

Hypotheses and Data

Political repression, of course, is not the only influence upon political participation and democratic culture. Students of these phenomena have identified many influences upon both (Conway 1991; Nagel 1987; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, and Kimn 1978). For the sake of brevity, we classify these influences as involving citizens' *demographic attributes* (living standard, education, sex, and age), *resources* (political knowledge and contact with news media), *attitudes* (opin-

	Costa Rica	Panama	Hon- duras	Nic- aragua	El Sal- vador	Guate- mala
Our regime repression index	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0	4.5	5.0
Duff and McCamant 1950-70	1.0	2.3	2.6	3.8	4.0	5.0
Poe Index	1.0	3.4	3.3	4.1	4.8	5.0

Finally, we correlated the individual-level measure of perceived violence with our structural index of regime repression. The zero-order correlation between the variables is .51, suggesting a relationship between the measures but revealing that they tap distinct phenomena. We thus retain both for subsequent analysis.

¹⁰Index values range from a possible 1.0 (very low) to 4.0 (very high). National means are: Costa Rica 1.75; El Salvador 3.78; Guatemala 3.44; Honduras 1.44; Nicaragua 3.12; and Panama 2.15. The results for El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala are much higher than those for Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama, corresponding roughly to what a close observer of those polities might reasonably expect citizens to perceive.

¹¹Note that this item does not, unfortunately, distinguish between perceived regime repression and perceived insurgent violence. This measure, therefore, should be interpreted as tapping a measure of respondents' perception of social violence. This limitation results from the survey designers' belief that to ask respondents about perceived regime or insurgent repression would have elicited a high refusal rate in the countries where repression had been intense or remained so. A general question about perceived violence was assessed to have less expected risk to respondents and therefore fewer refusals. Only 101 of 4,198 respondents (2.4%) declined to answer the item as phrased.

ions, beliefs, and values), and the *context* (traits of the society, polity, and economy) within which they live. Our data permit the evaluation of the relative impact of a number of personal resources, attitudes, and contextual features upon participation and support for democratic liberties. Since such possible influences upon the dependent variables may also correlate with repression at the structural and individual levels, however, we examine these phenomena both separately and together, attempting to identify the independent effects of repression upon participation and democratic norms, controlling for the other effects.

Based upon the foregoing discussion and literature, and upon what we know about the sharp differences in repression levels and regime types in Central America, we test the following hypotheses:

- H₁. Levels of political participation and of support for democratic liberties will vary across nations in Central America.
- H₂. Other factors held constant, citizens who perceive greater levels of repression (violence) will report less participation in politics and lower levels of support for democratic liberties.
- H₃. Other factors held constant, more intense system-level regime repression will depress citizens' reported levels of political participation and support for democratic liberties.

To test these hypotheses we analyze public opinion surveys administered in the early 1990s among comparable cross sections of the urban citizens of six Central American nations—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.¹² In mid-1991 surveys were con-

¹²We gratefully acknowledge the support for the collection of these data by the North-South Center of the University of Miami, the Howard Heinz Endowment-Center for Latin American Studies of the University of Pittsburgh Research Grants on Current Latin American Issues, University of North Texas Faculty Development Grants and Faculty Research programs, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Tinker Foundation, the Heinz Foundation, and the University of Pittsburgh. The project was designed and much of the data were collected by a team including Mitchell A. Seligson of the University of Pittsburgh and John Booth. Team members who also directed field work were Ricardo Córdova, Andrew Stein, Annabelle Conroy, Orlando Pérez, and Cynthia Chalker. Guatemala field work was conducted by the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES) of Guatemala. Invaluable assistance and collaboration were provided by the following institutions in Central America: Costa Rica Consejo Superior Universitaria Centroamericana (CSUCA), Maestría en Sociología, and the Universidad de Costa Rica, Departments of Statistics and Political Science; Nicaragua, Instituto de Estudios Internacionales (IEI), Universidad Centroamericana; Honduras, Centro de Estudio y Promoción del Desarrollo (CEPROD), and Centro de Documentación de Honduras; Panama, Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos "Justo Arosemena" (CELA); and El Salvador, Centro de Investigación y Acción Social (CINAS), and the Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (IDELA).

ducted among the urban voting-age populations of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. In 1992 a similar survey was conducted in Guatemala, followed in 1995 by another in Costa Rica.¹³ Items included in these surveys focused upon support for democratic norms, other political attitudes and values, political system evaluation and support, and political participation. Both political participation and democratic norms items have been widely validated and field tested in various cultural settings (Booth and Seligson 1984; Muller et al. 1987; Seligson and Booth 1993; Seligson and Gómez 1989).

To develop our indices of participation we examined responses to queries concerning 17 types of political activity (see notes to Table 1 for behaviors) for our samples. Following the lead of previous participation research,¹⁴ we factor analyzed the 17 variables. This revealed a regionwide dimensional structure of five distinctive modes of political participation: voting behavior (registration to vote and voting), campaigning (attempting to convince someone else how to vote), contacting various levels of public officials, communal activism (community self-help activity), and group activity (membership in voluntary organizations). In further analysis, we employ an index for each mode as well as a measure of overall participation that is the sum of the individual indicators.

Two major approaches to measuring democratic political culture have emerged, one associated with the civic culture/polyarchy concept and the

¹³In each nation a sample was drawn from the national capital and other major urban centers. Cluster sampling techniques were employed to select interviewees from stratified dwelling unit clusters throughout the target population, with the sampling frames stratified by socioeconomic level. Interviewees were chosen using randomizing procedures and following sex and age quotas set to approximate the most recent census data or projections for each cohort. All interviews were conducted face to face and respondents' anonymity was protected.

We collected a total of 4,089 interviews regionwide, but national sample Ns varied from 500 to 900. To prevent larger countrys' Ns from distorting findings in this analysis, the country samples reported throughout this paper have been weighted equally so that each national N equals approximately 700 (total N = 4,198).

We believe that our samples reflect the opinions of the urban populations of Central America (capital cities and other major cities and towns). Urbanites in Central America tend to be more involved in national politics and less in communal affairs than rural dwellers (Booth and Seligson 1979). In 1992 the urban populations were estimated as follows: Costa Rica 48%, El Salvador 45%, Guatemala 40%, Honduras 45%, Nicaragua 61%, and Panama 54% (IBRD 1994, 222-3). We would have preferred to interview significant rural samples to explore possible differential effects, but could not because of funding limitations. We therefore generalize only to citizens of urban areas—roughly half the region's populace, but a half we believe plays a pivotal role in national politics.

¹⁴Booth (1976), Booth and Seligson (1979) Verba and Nie (1972), Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978).

other with political tolerance.¹⁵ The former measures democratic culture in terms of the general willingness to extend political participation rights to others. The latter measures democratic norms in terms of willingness to grant political rights to disliked groups. Our measures of support for democratic liberties included 14 items tapping respondents' attitudes toward political participation rights in general and for regime critics. Factor analysis of these items revealed that these measures cluster into four separate dimensions of democratic norms, which we employ as indices: support of general participatory rights, opposition to the suppression of democratic liberties, tolerance of participation rights for regime critics, and support for acts of civil disobedience. We also constructed an overall democratic norms measure that is the arithmetic mean of respondents' scores for all 14 items.

The Evidence

The first hypothesis predicts national-level contextual effects upon levels of political participation and democratic culture in Central America. Table 1 presents country means on the five participation and four democratic norms indices, plus the overall indicators of both. The data strongly confirm H_1 . Urban Salvadorans participate less than all other Central Americans on three of five modes, and have the lowest overall participation scores. Guatemalans and Nicaraguans fall in a low-middle range of activism on most items. Panamanians, Hondurans and Costa Ricans have high levels of participation on most modes and are virtually tied on the overall participation index. National differences of means are all significant at the .0001 level.¹⁶

Furthermore, Table 1 reveals substantial national differences in the levels of support for democratic liberties. Country averages for support of general participatory rights exceed all other categories in most nations, followed in declining order by opposition to the suppression of democratic liberties, tolerance of rights for regime critics, and support for confrontational acts such as civil disobedience. Support for civil disobedience is quite low throughout the region (the regional mean is 2.31) in comparison to other democratic norms dimensions (whose regional means range from 5.98 to 7.94).¹⁷ Guatemalans and Salvadorans manifest the lowest commitment

¹⁵See Booth and Seligson (1984, 1993) for a discussion of these schools and the development of the measures used here.

¹⁶Preliminary research on the five participation modes (Booth and Richard 1994; Richard and Booth 1995) revealed differentiated patterns of correlates. Communalism appears particularly distinctive, a finding consistent with earlier research from Central America (Booth and Seligson 1979). We will explore these matters further in other venues.

¹⁷Preliminary analysis (Booth and Richard 1994) has shown that the correlates of tolerance for civil disobedience in Central America differ from those for other democratic norms

to democratic liberties overall. Urban Costa Ricans' and Nicaraguans' support for democratic norms occupy the middle range within the region, and Hondurans and Panamanians report the highest democratic norms levels.

One may observe that, at least roughly, the data suggest that more repressive regimes (such as Guatemala and El Salvador) have lower levels of both participation and support for democratic liberties than less repressive regimes such as Costa Rica, Panama, and Honduras. This correspondence is not perfect, however. Citizens of Costa Rica—the region's oldest and most successful democracy and consistently its least repressive regime—have the lowest mean score in the region on support for acts of civil disobedience. Costa Ricans also fall slightly below Nicaraguans and Panamanians in their support for general participatory rights, and behind Hondurans and Panamanians in tolerance for the rights of dissenters.¹⁸

Finally, Table 1 shows that the variation of the democratic norms ranges less than the variation of the participation indices. Levels of participation in Central America vary more across national boundaries than do levels of support for democratic liberties. It is particularly important to emphasize that scores on civil liberties fall in the democratic range (values above 5.0) throughout urban Central America, except for those on civil disobedience and Guatemalans' attitudes toward rights for regime critics. This general prevalence of a positive orientation toward democratic liberties among urban Central Americans is noteworthy in itself. It is especially significant in that it contradicts culturist pessimism about the prospects for democratic culture in Latin American settings.

Resources and Demographic Factors

For the remainder of this study we will essentially confine our analysis to the two overall indicators of political participation and of support for democratic norms. Table 2 presents data on how individual demographic characteristics (sex, age, education, and living standard) and resources (news media contact and level of political information) affect political participation and democratic norms. The reported results in Table 2 include beta weights (indicating the relative contribution to explained variance

dimensions. Space does not permit us to investigate each of the democratic norms dimensions here, but we intend to pursue this matter in further research.

¹⁸Allowing for the passage of a few years for changing domestic politics in each country, this finding is partially consistent with the report by Seligson and Booth (1993) in a study using different data sets that Nicaraguans' support for civil liberties equaled or exceeded those of Costa Ricans in the late 1980s. Our findings here suggest that the development of democratic values across the region is extensive, and has occurred in institutional settings even more authoritarian than Nicaragua.

Table 1. Participation Indices for Central American Urban Dwellers, by Country^a

Variable	Guatemala	Honduras	El Salvador	Nicaragua	Costa Rica	Panamá	Region
PARTICIPATION							
Voting ^b	1.51	1.86	1.39	1.62	1.91	1.72	1.67
Campaigning ^c	.25	1.08	.18	.47	.87	.84	.62
Contacting public officials ^d	.41	.77	.32	.17	.56	.56	.46
Communal self-help activism ^e	1.09	.87	1.05	1.56	1.80	1.28	1.27
Group activism ^f	.66	1.05	.33	.43	.47	.84	.63
Overall participation ^g	4.01	5.65	3.22	4.32	5.62	5.22	4.70
SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC LIBERTIES							
General participation rights ^h	7.06	8.07	7.47	8.31	8.22	8.46	7.94
Oppose suppression of liberties ⁱ	6.25	5.82	5.25	6.45	7.04	6.78	6.26
Rights for regime critics ^j	4.60	6.99	5.21	5.69	6.12	7.10	5.98
Support for civil disobedience ^k	2.01	3.41	2.12	2.42	1.93	1.96	2.31
Overall democratic norms ^l	5.51	6.98	5.71	6.42	6.77	7.33	6.48

^aDifferences of means between countries on all participation and democratic norms items significant at the .0001 level or greater.

^bRegistered to vote plus voted in last election; yes = 1, no = 0 for each; range = 0-2.

^cAttempted to persuade others how to vote or worked on campaign in last or prior election; 1 = yes, 0 = no for each; range = 0-3.

^dEver contacted president, legislative deputy, city council member, or national government agency; yes = 1, no = 0; range = 0-4.

^eInvolvement in five community self-help activities; 1 = yes, 0 = no for each; range = 0-5.

^fSometimes attend union, civic association, cooperative or professional association; yes = 1, no = 0 for each; range = 0-4.

^gSum of scores on contacting, communal, campaigning, voting, and group activity; range = 0-18.

^hIndex of support for general participatory rights; range 1-10.

ⁱIndex of opposition to the suppression of civil liberties; range 1-10.

^jIndex of support for participatory rights for regime critics (tolerance); range 1-10.

^kIndex of support for acts of civil disobedience; range 1-10.

^lOverall index of support for democratic liberties (arithmetic mean of all 14 items); range 1-0.

Table 2. Multiple Regression, Participation and Democratic Norms on Individual Resource Variables and Demographic Factors (Beta Weights Significant at .05 or Better), Urban Central America.

Variable	Political Participation	Support for Democratic Norms
Sex (M = 1, F = 2)	-.128****	
Age	.105****	.047**
Education	.084****	.087****
Living Standard ^a	.061**	.125****
News Media Contact ^b	.126****	
Political Information ^c	.055**	.236****
<i>R</i> ²	.094	.125
Standard Error	2.89	1.85
<i>F</i>	52.63	88.02
Significance of <i>F</i>	.0000	.0000
(<i>N</i>)	(3184)	(3692)

Significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001; **** = .0001.

^aLiving standard is an index of family wealth based upon the ownership of color televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, telephones, and automobiles; range 0-15.

^bAn index of news media contact based upon reported listening to news on television, radio, and reading the newspaper daily; range 0-3.

^cAn index of political information/knowledge based upon giving correct answers to questions about name of U.S. Secretary of State, Russian President, and number of seats in national legislature; range 0-3.

made by each independent variable) for all variables with coefficients significant at least at the .05 level.

Table 2 suggests that females, irrespective of the other resources, take part in the range of political activities examined less than men.¹⁹ Greater age, educational attainment, and living standard are also linked to higher levels of participation. Among the political resources of individuals, level of news media contact and level of political information both contribute positively to Central American citizens' political activism. Overall, however, the contribution of resources and demographic factors to participation is weak; the total *R*² (percent of variance explained) for the six demographic and resource variables accounts for only 9.4% of the variation in political participation.

¹⁹We have noted elsewhere (Booth and Richard 1994; Richard and Booth 1995) that this is not true across all modes of political participation. Central American urban females participate in communal activism and voting at rates equal to those of men.

In contrast to the results for participation, Table 2 suggests that neither sex nor level of news media contact influence support for democratic norms. The most striking effect in Table 2 is that of political information upon support for democratic liberties, the beta for which is far larger than that of any other variable. Thus, even with the effects of education and wealth controlled, citizens who know more about politics tend to report a greater commitment to democratic liberties than those less well-informed. Greater age, living standard, and educational attainment positively affect support for democratic liberties in urban Central America.²⁰ Again though, as for participation, resources and demographic traits together explain a rather modest 12.5% of the variance of democratic norms.

Attitudes

Table 3 presents multiple regression results for the effects of various attitudinal variables (plus our four basic demographic variables) upon political participation and democratic norms. All of the variables in each model have been widely reported, in research cited elsewhere in this paper, to influence either or both participation and democratic values. For instance, Inglehart (1990), drawing upon the arguments of Almond and Verba (1963), argues that diffuse support for (generally positive attitudes toward) the polity and interpersonal trust are essential to the development of democratic norms among citizens.

In contrast, high levels of life satisfaction, religious fundamentalism, and anticommunism have been hypothesized to reduce participation and support for democratic liberties among citizens. In Central America in particular, with the notable exception of the revolutionary government of Nicaragua between 1979 and 1990, recent regimes have well-known records of anticommunist rhetoric, inculcating anticommunism, and using anticommunism to justify political repression. We expect those who have adopted such beliefs to participate less in politics and to manifest less support for democratic liberties.²¹

²⁰The weak effect of age on democratic norms is at least partly an artifact of young urban Central Americans' tendency to voice higher levels of support for civil disobedience than older respondents. This runs counter to the general trend for other components of the overall index. Indeed, breaking out resource and demographic effects upon support for civil disobedience alone, we find that the young, the poor, and those who are better informed harbor a more favorable attitude toward civil disobedience than most other citizens.

²¹One might expect elite bias to be reproduced in a mass public's tendency toward anticommunism, and thus be more intense where rightist regimes like those in El Salvador and Guatemala for decades have rationalized their war against dissidents, opponents, and insurgents as an anticommunist crusade. Mean national levels of anticommunist sentiment as measured by our index (range 0–6, low score means less anticommunist feelings), however, are as follows: Costa Rica 4.3, Honduras 4.2, Panama 3.9, Guatemala 3.8, El Salvador 3.6, and Nicaragua 2.9. Urban Guatemalans and Salvadorans manifest only middling levels of anticommunism while anticommunist views are most intense in Costa Rica, where com-

Most important among the attitudes in this study, citizens' perception of violence—our perceptual measure of generalized repression—is included in the regression models in Table 3. This permits a test of H_2 , which predicts that, other factors equal, greater perceived repression will depress both participation and democratic norms. As noted above, national levels of perceived violence are higher precisely where recent history would lead one to expect them to be—in Guatemala and El Salvador, followed by Nicaragua.

Table 3 confirms H_2 regarding political participation, although the effect is weak. Controlling for other attitudes and demographic traits, those who perceive higher levels of violence participate somewhat less in politics. Other attitudinal effects upon participation are also modest. Interpersonal trust and support for democratic norms have weak positive effects on participation.²² As expected, citizens who are more anticommunist tend to take part in politics less than those who express less anticommunism, but the effect is slight. Citizens with greater life satisfaction (more content with their income, homes, and life situation in general) are less politically active than the unsatisfied. Thus, even controlling for education and living standard, dissatisfaction with the state of one's life serves as a goad to political activism among Central Americans.²³ Diffuse support and religious fundamentalism appear unrelated to participation levels. Overall, the attitudinal factors together with demographic variables (which tend to be stronger) explain only 11.1% of the variance in political participation.

Table 3 reveals a significant negative influence of perceived repression upon support for democratic liberties, as predicted by H_2 , but the effect is weak. More intense anticommunism reduces support for democratic norms. Higher levels of political participation associate weakly with higher support for democratic liberties.²⁴ Greater life satisfaction and religious fundamentalism very weakly reduce overall democratic norms. Interpersonal trust

munists have participated openly in the polity for decades and have experienced much less institutional repression. Perhaps to be expected is that anticommunism is the least intense in Nicaragua, where the Marxist-Leninist Sandinista National Liberation Front held power from 1979 through 1990, to some extent legitimizing the left.

²²The variable labeled "democratic norms" in this analysis and in Table 5 is the summary variable for overall support for democratic liberties. It is included here as an independent attitudinal variable to permit the exploration of the links between democratic norms and participation.

²³We have reported elsewhere (Booth and Richard 1994) that the effect of life "dissatisfaction" is greatest for campaigning and contacting.

²⁴The overall participation variable reported here and in Tables 3 and 5 as an independent variable is the overall participation measure that is also one of our two dependent variables. While a behavior rather than an attitude, it is included here for the sake of simplicity of structuring the analysis.

Table 3. Multiple Regression, Participation and Democratic Norms on Attitudinal Variables and Demographic Factors (Beta Weights Significant at .05 or Better), Urban Central America.

Variable	Political Participation	Support for Democratic Norms
Perceived Violence ^a	-.085****	-.072****
Anticommunism ^b	-.058**	-.150****
Interpersonal Trust ^c	.065****	
Diffuse Support ^d		
Life Satisfaction ^e	-.116****	-.041*
Religious Fundamentalism ^f		-.058**
Democratic Norms ^g	.094****	.080****
Sex (M = 1, F = 2)	-.128****	
Age	.126****	.063***
Education	.093****	.116****
Living Standard	.082***	.165****
R ²	.111	.121
Standard Error	2.86	1.87
F	36.11	39.80
Significance of F	.0000	.0000
(N)	(3184)	(3180)

Significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001; **** = .0001.

^aR's answer to "How much political violence is there [in this country]? Much, some, a little, or none?"; range 0-3; higher score = more perceived violence.

^bIndex of intensity of anticommunism (based on 2 items); range 0-6, higher value = more intense anticommunist leanings.

^cIndex of interpersonal trust (based on 3 trust orientation items); range 0-3; higher value = greater trust in others.

^dIndex of diffuse support (general approval of) national institutions (based on 6 items); range 0-6; higher value = greater diffuse support.

^eIntensity of satisfaction with R's life, family income, and house; range 0-9; higher score = greater life satisfaction.

^fIndex of religious fundamentalism (based on 3 items); range 0-9; higher score = more accord with fundamentalist positions.

^gIndex of support for democratic liberties; 14 items; range 1-10; higher score = greater mean support for democratic liberties.

^hIndex of overall political participation level (based on 17 items); range = 0-17; higher score = greater participation.

and diffuse support for the system have no significant effect upon democratic liberties orientation among urban Central Americans. At 12.1%, the overall variance explained by attitudes (plus demographic variables) is rather modest.

Table 3's regression equations reveal that democratic norms support increased political participation, while greater participation improves adop-

tion of democratic norms. This finding of a significant independent, reciprocal influence between participation and democratic values supports Pateman's (1970) prediction of such a relationship.²⁵

Political-economic Context

We turn now to the influence of contextual factors. In order to identify the effect of specific national traits upon participation and democratic norms, we have constructed indices of three general phenomena that can shape the political activity of all citizens. In addition to the measure of regime political repression, described above, we employ a measure of general political instability since 1932 (a longer term historical force), based upon the total number of successful coups d'état and new national constitutions in each country. We surmise that, in a nation plagued by frequent coups and political rules changes, citizens might tailor their participation to compensate for such circumstances. We also suspect that citizens of more unstable polities might value democratic norms more. The final contextual measure, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 1991, taps overall national levels of economic activity. Table 4 presents regression models for the independent effects of these contextual variables upon both participation levels and support for democratic liberties.

H₃ predicts that, other factors held constant, higher levels of system-level repression will lower citizens' reported political participation and support for democratic liberties. Here we partially test this hypothesis by comparing the independent effects of each of these three contextual variables in Table 4. We find strong confirmation of H₃: regime repression depresses (with one of the larger betas we have seen in the analysis so far) political participation (beta = $-.233$). Indeed regime repression contributes substantially more to the variance in urban Central Americans' political activity levels than do any of their individual level demographic traits. This pattern is even more sharply delineated for Central Americans' support for

²⁵Pateman also argues that participation's influence on democratic norms may be partly indirect, or mediated. For instance, participation may boost political knowledge, media contact, and a sense of political efficacy (to mention but a few possibilities), all of which may then contribute to an increase in democratic norms. Evidence for the importance of one of these—political knowledge—stands out clearly in Tables 2 and 5. Those who know more about politics support democratic norms more strongly than the less knowledgeable. Further, separate analysis suggests that education, living standard, media contact, and participation contribute significantly to levels of political knowledge. For urban Central Americans, therefore, information is most likely acquired through the educational system, the mass media, and participation itself. These findings suggest that the effect of each of these (especially of media contact) upon democratic norms is at least partly mediated through political knowledge.

Table 4. Multiple Regression, Participation and Democratic Norms on Contextual Variables and Demographic Factors (Beta Weights Significant at .05 or Better), Urban Central America.

Variable	Political Participation	Support for Democratic Norms
Repression ^a	-.233****	-.314****
Political Instability ^b		
GDP per Capita ^c		-.083***
Sex (M = 1, F = 2)	-.161****	-.048**
Age	.107****	.067****
Education	.136****	.157****
Living Standard ^a		.056**
<i>R</i> ²	.118	.143
Standard Error	2.85	1.83
<i>F</i>	73.34	95.28
Significance of <i>F</i>	.0000	.0000
(<i>N</i>)	(3854)	(4006)

Significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001; **** = .0001.

^aIndex of systemic repression level for ten years prior to survey and time of survey; range = 1-5; higher score = greater repression.

^bInstability of polity since 1932 (sum of number of successful coups and of new constitutions [Nohlen 1993]); higher score = greater national political instability.

^cGross domestic product per capita in 1990 (UNDP 1993, T. 1).

democratic norms; the greater the level of regime repression in a country, the less prone are its citizens to support democratic norms (beta = -.314). Clearly, then, a climate of general political repression reduces Central Americans' political participation as well as their propensity to support democratic liberties,²⁶ the data thus confirming the third hypothesis.

Findings for the other contextual variables in Table 4 warrant further comment. Our contextual measure of political instability shows no significant effect upon political participation overall. As noted above, we suspected that instability might affect different modes of participation in different ways. Indeed, preliminary examination of particular modes suggests that in the less stable Central American nations citizens increase contacting

²⁶We have noted elsewhere (Booth and Richard 1994) that, when the various modes of participation are examined individually, communal activism provides an intriguing exception to this pattern. Urban Central Americans' communal activism does not decline in high-repression regimes. We surmise that communalism's local, self-help orientation may insulate it from the repressive regimes' efforts to manipulate participation.

and group activism and decrease their voting and communal activism. Thus in more unstable political settings, citizens rationally tailor their participatory strategies, pursuing their political interests through direct contacting of officials and interest group activity, rather than through such unpredictable mediating entities as elections and parties. This finding illustrates the potential utility of the more complex understanding that can be derived by disaggregating political participation into its components.

National-level instability also appears unrelated to support for democratic norms based on the results in Table 4. Again, however, when we disaggregate into the four democratic norms dimensions we identified in Table 1, we uncover complex relationships. For example, in countries with greater long-term political instability, citizens manifest less support for general participation rights and less opposition to the suppression of democratic liberties, but greater support for dissenters' rights and for civil disobedience. This suggests citizens of Central America's more turbulent and unstable polities may come to view dissent and confrontational political tactics as more useful or necessary tools than citizens of more stable regimes. This suggests that long term regime instability in Central America may breed support for confrontational political tactics.

Our measure of national economic activity, GDP per capita, has no statistically significant impact upon political participation. The absence of a link between overall participation levels and economic development is consistent with findings of Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978, 61).

Intriguingly, the effect of GDP per capita upon support for democratic liberties is negative (Table 4). This contradicts Inglehart's (1990) contention that the emergence of democratic culture requires that nations first attain a certain level of economic prosperity. His argument suggests the hypothesis that GDP per capita should correlate positively with support for democratic liberties—quite the reverse of what we find in urban Central America. We will explore this anomalous result further in the discussion.

Relative to other types of factors we have considered, one contextual variable—regime repression level—stands out for its influence on participation and democratic norms. Nevertheless, when considered together with individual-level demographic factors, the overall variance explained by contextual variables is modest for both participation (11.8%) and support for democratic liberties (14.3%).

Relative Impact of Individual and System-level Repression Upon Participation

In order to evaluate the relative importance of individuals' perceived violence compared to system-level repression on participation and democratic norms, we pursue refined regression models of each. From the results

Table 5. Refined Models: Multiple Regression, Participation and Democratic Norms on Demographic, Resources, Attitudinal, and Contextual Variables, Urban Central America.

Political Participation		Democratic Norms	
Variable	Beta/Signif.	Variable	Beta/Signif.
Sex (M = 1, F = 2)	-.122****	Education	.056**
Age	.092****	Standard of living	.056**
Education	.076****	Political information	.222****
News media contact	.128****	Overall participation	.049**
Political information	.050**	Anticommunism	-.142****
Democratic norms	.050**	Religious fundamentalism	-.033*
Life satisfaction	-.082****	Regime repression	-.274****
Interpersonal trust	.056****	GDP per capita	-.049*
Anticommunism	-.060****	R ²	.202
Regime repression	-.191****	Standard Error	1.769
R ²	.146	F	110.94
Standard Error	2.805	Significance of F	.0000
F	55.99	(N)	(3511)
Significance of F	.0000		
(N)	(3279)		

Significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001; **** = .0001.

described above in Tables 2, 3 and 4, we develop an initial, parsimonious model that includes all the significant (at the .05 level) demographic, resource, attitudinal, and contextual influences upon our dependent variables.

Based on our hypotheses and the results discussed above we expected, other factors being held equal, the following influences upon political participation (with direction of influence indicated by sign): female sex -, age +, education +, living standard +, contact with new media +, political information +, anticommunism -, interpersonal trust +, life satisfaction -, democratic norms +, regime repression -, and perceived violence -. An initial regression run was performed, and then further reduced by deleting from a final equation independent variables whose coefficients had probabilities greater than .05.

The resultant refined model for political participation in Table 5 largely recapitulates previous findings and substantiates most of the predictions listed above. The strongest influences (expressed in terms of beta coefficients) upon political participation are, in descending order, regime repression (-.191), media contact (.128), female sex (-.122), age (.092), life satisfaction (-.082), and education (.076). The refined participation regres-

sion model also reveals weaker but significant associations with participation for political information (+), anticommunism (-), interpersonal trust (+), and support for democratic norms (+). Variance in citizen participation explained by the model is 14.6%.

The failure of our measure of perceived violence to perform as we had hypothesized stands as one of the most striking results of the refined model. Perceived violence has no apparent impact upon political participation levels independent of the level of regime repression and other control variables. Also noteworthy by their absence from the refined participation model are effects of two of the three contextual measures—economic development level (GDP per capita) and political instability.²⁷

Turning to democratic norms, hypotheses and prior results lead us to expect that, other factors being held equal, the following influences would be observed (direction of influence indicated by sign): age +, education +, living standards +, political information +, anticommunism -, life satisfaction -, religious fundamentalism +, political participation +, economic development level -, regime repression -, and perceived violence -. The model for democratic norms in Table 5 again largely reproduces previous findings and upholds most of these expectations. The strongest influences (expressed in terms of beta coefficients) upon democratic norms are, in descending order: regime repression (-.274), political knowledge (.222), and anticommunism (-.142). Much weaker but significant associations appear for the independent variables education (+), living standard (+), overall participation (+), and economic development level (GDP per capita) (-). We detect no significant influence upon democratic norms for sex, age, media contact, interpersonal trust, diffuse support, life satisfaction, or instability. Overall, the total variance of democratic norms explained by the refined model is 20.2%. Consistent with earlier results, both perceived violence and political instability fall out of the refined regression equation.

To summarize the most important finding of this section, in urban Central America individual level perceptions of violence affect neither participation nor democratic norms. At this stage, therefore, we fail to confirm H_2 regarding perceived violence; other variables in the model wash out the impact upon both participation and democratic values of citizens' estimates of their societies' violence levels. The system-level regime repression variable, in sharp contrast to perceived violence, is the strongest of all the independent variables in both equations.

It is useful to speculate further why perceived violence levels have so

²⁷Recall, however, that political system instability differentially affects distinct modes of repression—decreasing voting and communalism while increasing contacting and group activity.

little apparent effect on either participation or democratic values. First, as noted above, our measure of perceived violence ("How much violence is there in [country name]?") does not discriminate among regime-initiated repression, insurgent-generated repression, or even criminal violence. Thus the question as couched may simply not have provided respondents with a specific enough referent. Second, even though the regime repression and perceived violence measures have a zero-order correlation of .51, when other factors are controlled perceived violence may simply be reduced to a function of systemic repression. Third, the effect of perceived repression may shape behaviors and attitudes selectively; that is, it may interact with such contextual cues as systemic repression to suggest where and how to participate or what values to espouse.

These possibilities require us to explore the interplay between systemic repression and perceived violence as they affect political participation and democratic norms. In the more repressive regimes, do citizens who are particularly aware of levels of violence alter their reported behavior or beliefs more sharply than their less violence-sensitive neighbors?

Analysis of variance helps assess such possible interaction effects. We therefore perform an analysis of variance on the effect of repression, perceived violence, and their interaction upon the participation index. Other significant independent variables in the regression model for participation (Table 5) were included as covariates in order to filter out their effects. The results of the analysis of variance (not fully laid out here for the sake of space) basically confirm the regression results in Table 5.²⁸ Perceived violence exercises no significant effect upon participation, but regime repression does. Further, analysis of variance uncovers no repression-perceived violence interaction effect upon political participation. Thus we find no evidence that the more violence-aware or violence-sensitive urban Central Americans who also live in repressive polities adjust their participation levels according to perceived violence levels any more than those who are less violence-perceiving.

²⁸ Analysis of variance revealed the following sources of variance (expressed as mean squares):

Source of variance	Participation (sig.)	Demo. norms (sig.)
Covariates	350.7 (.000)	245.6 (.000)
Regime repression	262.6 (.000)	186.9 (.000)
Perceived violence	6.8 (NS)	4.0 (NS)
Repress.-viol. int.	5.2 (NS)	10.1 (.001)

We also perform an analysis of variance on the democratic norms index. Again, other independent variables in the refined regression model (Table 5) were included as covariates. The results (see the previous note for partial results) differ somewhat from those for participation. As expected, regime repression significantly affects democratic norms but perceived violence does not. Unlike participation, however, a modest regime repression-perceived violence interaction effect appears for democratic norms. Thus, the more violence-aware among Central Americans are indeed less likely to express support for democratic norms where systemic repression levels are also high.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our data suggest strongly that political repression discourages both political participation and support for democratic liberties in urban Central America. Regime repression measured structurally—as a national contextual variable—depresses citizen activity and undercuts support for democracy. Even controlling for the effects of other systemic traits such as development level, as well as for individual demographic characteristics, resources, and attitudes, system-level repression stands as the strongest determinant of both dependent variables. Repression at the individual level—as perceived violence—plays a largely insignificant role except in interaction with regime repression in shaping democratic norms.

Our findings clearly demonstrate the power of the political context effects to shape Central Americans' political behavior and attitudes toward democracy. Our research design is one involving most-similar systems, thus minimizing many possible confounding influences upon the relationships among variables. As noted earlier, Central America's countries are similar in their diminutive size, relative poverty, and shared historical experiences. In recent decades, however, they have experienced striking differences in regime type and in the amount and nature of repression and violence. We sought to tap into these by comparing levels of participation and support for democracy cross-nationally, and by employing contextual measures of repression, political instability, and economic development level. Confirming that findings by Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) apply to a broader array of dependent variables, we have shown that a single structural factor—regime repression—far outweighs demographic, attitudinal, and resource determinants of citizen activity and democratic culture in urban Central America.

These Central American data raise questions about the relationship between economic development, democratic norms, and democratization. Inglehart (1990) suggests a path of democratization in which attainment of relative economic prosperity constitutes an essential prior step to a nation's

development of democratic political culture and then democracy. As measured here in terms of GDP per capita, national economic development levels correlate *negatively*, rather than positively, with democratic norms. While neither our data nor model are dynamic, our findings pose an interesting puzzle for this theory about democratization. It is true, of course, that the range of economic development represented in these countries is much smaller than the range worldwide and that the number of countries is small. These may be confounding factors here. Inglehart's theory about democratization would predict little mass support, however, for democratic norms in Central America given the region's general poverty. Yet we find democratic norms levels to be quite high in most of the isthmus. Were democratic culture in the isthmus developing as Inglehart expects, it should be stronger in the richer rather than poorer nations.

Why these anomalies? The answer probably lies in a combination of factors, including national experience and citizen exposure to certain kinds of socializing forces. First, we have found that both political knowledge, individual educational attainment, and participation levels correlate with democratic norms (Table 5). This suggests that, irrespective of or even in spite of economic development levels, citizens' acquisition of participation experience, education, or political knowledge may lead to greater support for democracy. In recent years urban Central Americans have been virtually bombarded by reports from home and abroad extolling the virtues of political democracy and (at a minimum) electoral participation. This could well have encouraged widespread adoption of democratic norms—especially among urbanites—whether their country is more or less economically developed.

Second, Inglehart argues that a democratic culture must precede structural democracy. However, in recent years even poorer isthmian nations such as Honduras and Nicaragua have begun transitions toward democratic rule, albeit often rocky and tentative. The urban citizens of such poorer, democratizing countries may well have "prematurely" (i.e., before socioeconomic development would normally generate them) developed powerful instrumental reasons to support democratic liberties in hopes of making their political lives more stable and secure.²⁹ Finally, the actual adoption of structural democracy itself or the reduction of repression may legitimize and encourage democratic norms irrespective of development level. Five of six Central American nations adopted democratic rules of the game (or

²⁹See Seligson and Booth (1993) for more on this argument.

at least substantially liberalized authoritarian rule) during the decade before our surveys. Our findings clearly demonstrate how a single contextual factor—regime repression—markedly shapes both democratic norms and participation. We suspect that, like reduced repression, regime democratization may also be a source of mass allegiance to democratic norms.

Late twentieth century Central American countries appear to be taking a quite different path toward democratic culture than the one attributed historically to the industrial democracies. Our findings suggest the need to evaluate further the links among democratic norms, economic development, and the sequence of democratization in developing nations.

In conclusion, we believe that our findings have potentially important policy implications. We have presented evidence suggesting that structural changes in politics, whether engineered by incumbent elites or by their challengers through revolution, have considerable potential to shape citizens' behavior and values. True structural democratization or even the mere reduction of repression (political liberalization), both of which had been under way in Central America in the years immediately preceding our study, seem to have opened the arena for citizens' engagement in politics in a variety of ways. We suspect that structural democratization contributes importantly to the high level of support for the citizen participation that is essential to democracy. We have shown elsewhere (Booth and Richard 1994) that sharp differences between the levels of political participation of men and women in Central America have essentially vanished in arenas, such as voting, where the state encourages women to take part. Our findings here suggest strongly that elites, by repressing their citizens less, can encourage both democratic participation and culture. Of course, national elites may not desire these outcomes, precisely because citizen expectations and participation could constrain elite prerogatives and power.

Wiarda (1990, 1992a, 1992b) argues that in Latin America political culture evolves very slowly and constitutes a continuing barrier to democratization. Inglehart's (1990) view that systemic democratization requires economic development prior to the development of democratic culture also raises real doubts about Latin America's prospects for democratization. We believe, however, that our findings call into question the suppositions that regional poverty and mass political culture are millstones around the neck of democracy. Rather, our findings may be read to support the arguments of human rights advocates that intense political repression—not an authoritarian mass culture—is the most significant barrier to Central American democracy because it reduces citizen participation in politics and curtails democratic political culture. Irrespective of their poverty or individual resources, where urban Central Americans enjoy more political space because

of low regime repression, they are more politically engaged and more democratically inclined.

Manuscript submitted 27 April 1995.

Final manuscript received 10 October 1995.

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