

Burdick
and
Hewitt



The Church at the Grassroots in Latin A

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The Church at the Grassroots in Latin America

Perspectives on Thirty Years of Activism

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John Burdick and W.E. Hewitt

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Chapter 1

Religion, Political Preferences, and Protest Action in Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala

Andrew J. Stein

[I]n certain situations of intolerable social injustice, the people have the right to exercise active violence when civilized means have been exhausted and no solution is found to the evil [that persists]. (Archbishop Obando y Bravo, 1978, as quoted in Lozano, 1989: 217)

INTRODUCTION

Religiously motivated protest participation in politics has been said to be one of the noteworthy changes that have resulted from the development of a progressive element in the Catholic churches of Latin America in the past three decades (Mainwaring and Wilde, 1989: 2-3). In addition to the push for social change through such pastoral initiatives as base Christian communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs) and Lay Delegates of the Word (Delegados de la Palabra, DPs), it has been argued that citizen participation in politics has increased as a result of the influence of the progressive wing of the church, represented both by activist lay Catholics and by priests and nuns in the parishes. What Muller (1979) has termed "aggressive political participation" is a common and established pattern of citizen action in Central America, and during the mass mobilization and revolutionary violence that characterized the 1970s and 1980s, religion was said to have made a significant contribution to increased levels of unconventional participation. Yet it is surprising that in more than 25 years of studying this mode of citizen action in Europe (Muller, 1979; Dalton, 1988; Kaase, and Marsh, 1979), the United States (Gamson, 1990), and Latin

America (Dietz, 1992; Muller, 1979; Seligson, 1979; Carrion, 1993), few have given systematic attention to the influence of religion (the important exceptions are Langton, 1984; Langton and Rapoport, 1976).¹

In this chapter, I consider the relationship of religious factors to support for unconventional political participation in Central America.² I also show how differing sociopolitical contexts heavily condition the extent to which the progressive church can have an impact upon citizen protest in the region. In the concluding section I compare the attitudes of parish priests and masses toward political protest and explain why there are variations over time and across groups.

Unconventional political participation includes various forms of civil disobedience, including, but not exclusively limited to, resort to violent political acts like land seizures, forceful building takeovers, and participation in armed antistystem insurgencies.³ This form of protest politics is taken as a possible key barometer of the explicitly partisan political influence of the progressive church in Central America and as a way of considering patterns of protest over time in individual countries. If protest is used as an indicator of the political consequences of the grassroots organization and mobilization by the progressive Catholic Church, its ebb and flow can indirectly point to the varied influence of this group within each national church in varied sociopolitical and religious contexts.

I have selected the cases of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the three cases most characterized by political violence and unconventional participation in all of Central America. The chapter discusses the impact of religion on unconventional participation in the three countries and then proceeds to an analysis of determinants of antistystem actions among the mass publics in the three cases: socioeconomic status, and psychological, political, and religious factors. Next, I move to an analysis of Nicaraguan clergy to compare their levels of support for protest with those of the Nicaraguan mass public and to determine whether the factors associated with mass protest action are also in evidence among religious elites. The relationship between predicting factors of unconventional and conventional modes of participation for priests and the mass public is discussed in order to examine how the two modes operate and may be interrelated. In the closing section, I discuss the priest-mass comparisons on support for protest in Nicaragua in the light of the secondary literature on the role of progressive Catholicism in the revolution and in the present political context of that country.

BACKGROUND

Since the publication of Berryman's (1984) path-breaking study, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, a substantial literature on the linkage between pastoral work by progressive elements in the Catholic Church and popular mass

mobilization for collective action in the political conflicts of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala has developed. In Nicaragua, church officials denounced Somoza, called his overthrow legitimate, rejected the forceful removal of dissidents from churches, and repeatedly protested against the abuses of the National Guard (Dodson and Montgomery, 1982). Rural pastoral work by laypersons contributed to the formation of peasant unions, logistical contacts with Sandinista guerrilla fighters, and part of the motivation for participation in protest (Dodson and O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Gould, 1990; Pochet and Martinez, 1987; Pochet, 1983; Smutko, 1981). Specifically, religious activities provided moral justification and unifying communications on which action could be based or, in Tarrow's words (1994: 123), "inscribing grievances in overall frames that identify an injustice, attribute responsibility for it to others and propose solutions to it." In El Salvador and Guatemala, as well, the growth of peasant unions, mass mobilization against state repression, and heightened political awareness and demands were, in part, the result of early Christian Democratic (PDC and DCCG) activists' efforts and, later, or the work of priests, nuns, and lay leaders (Stoll, 1993: 169-174; Chea, 1988; Garcia Ruiz, 1988; Henríquez, 1988; Berryman, 1986, 1984; Arias, 1985; Opazo, 1985). Whatever the original intent behind these efforts—building up electoral support, regaining allegiance to the church—the practical consequence was often (unintended) increased protest by the mass public in the three countries, largely with religious motivations (Brockett, 1991: 257-260). The appearance of mass participants linked to the church on the national political scene was stronger in recent decades than in the previous period, partially due to the church's fear or dislike of mass protest.⁴ Also unique was the fact that the challenging groups (both armed insurgents like the FSLN [Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional], FMLIN [Frente Unido Martí de Liberación Nacional], and URNG [Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala], and nonarmed mass movements) worked with religious personnel for the inclusion in public life of formerly nonparticipant sectors of the three polities, producing a qualitative change in the conflict (Tilly, 1978: 192). As an initial task, then, it is appropriate to consider whether the survey data provide support for the religious impact on protest behavior.

DATA SETS AND HYPOTHESES

The data analyzed in this chapter were obtained from mass surveys undertaken in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, conducted in 1991-1992.⁵ The priest data are from a Nicaraguan sample of 142 members of the Catholic clergy interviewed by the author in 1993-1994.⁶ The questionnaire items in all four surveys were identical (for a full description of sampling procedures and the survey instruments see Stein, 1995).

Conventional Explanations

Based on previous studies of Latin American protest participation, I expect that social and economic factors will be important determinants of who protests, irrespective of religious affiliation. The profile of those who most support protest actions⁷ is citizens who have a high level of formal education, are young (high school or university student age), and are among lower-income groups.⁸ Political attitudes also condition a citizen's disposition to protest. The highest level of support for protest actions will be found among those respondents who also show high political efficacy.⁹ Moreover, since there is a contingent, instrumental aspect to political tolerance,¹⁰ respondents with higher levels of tolerance¹¹ will also exhibit higher levels of support for unconventional types of political participation. In terms of ideology,¹² leftists will be over-represented among protesters compared to those citizens who align themselves more toward the middle or the right of the political spectrum.

Religious Explanations

As far as religious determinants of support for protest are concerned, the most basic thing to keep in mind is that their impact on support for political protest will vary.

Despite the purportedly conservative preferences of Evangelical Protestants in the region, it must be remembered that Central American Catholics are a quite heterogeneous group, and therefore denominational differences in levels of protest will be minimal.¹³ Religiosity (measured as frequency of church attendance and prayer) is more strongly (and negatively) related to protest action.

In addition to patterns of religious practices, religious beliefs are also quite consequential for understanding which Catholics (and more generally, members of the mass publics in these three countries) are most likely to approve of protest action. Individuals with fundamentalist¹⁴ religious attitudes will tend to show the lowest levels of unconventional participation. Since it has been argued that liberation theology in the church (most notably, among the progressive, grassroots sectors) was influential on levels of support for unconventional political action, those who most agree with a Church of the Poor¹⁵ will show the highest levels of support for protest, just the opposite pattern of citizens with fundamentalist religious beliefs and attitudes.

Religious Elites and Masses

Given that the appeal of the progressive Catholic vision was said to have been great among poor Catholics in Latin America and that the clergy who elaborated the theology of liberation were very successful in promoting this discourse among the poor, it is necessary to examine the priest-parishioner con-

nection. I expect that the Nicaraguan mass public will show higher levels of support for protest behavior than religious elites (parish priests), both because of the latter's position as a social elite and because of their preference for non-confrontational action to resolve conflicts.¹⁶

Among the Catholic clergy, it is likely that the extent to which priests support unconventional citizen action depends much on their professional socialization. More specifically, the location and content of seminary training, the personal experiences a priest has with political authorities, and varied church, social, and political context will account for the inter-generational differences among priests. Those cohorts ordained between the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Sandinista-led revolution (1979) will be the strongest supporters of unconventional types of participation.

FINDINGS

Conventional Explanations of Protest

In his recent study of unconventional participation in Peru, Dietz (1992: 20) described the typical protester as "young, poor, [with] intense feelings of dissatisfaction, alienation and deprivation," and he found that respondents with some years of university education were the most frequent participants in unconventional actions. At this juncture it is appropriate to examine the evidence from the three Central American cases most characterized by political protest to see whether the profile holds for Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Initially, the factors that help predict who most supports unconventional participation will be considered separately, and then in a multiple regression equation. Table 1.1 reveals that generally, support for protest is quite low in the three countries, as much as 5-7 points lower than the levels of approval for conventional participation in the Central American cases (Stein, 1995), and little different from that of Costa Rica, a country that has experienced none of the political violence so typical of these three cases.

Table 1.1
Mass Support for Protest by Country (mean scores, 1-10)

Action	Nicaragua	El Salvador	Guatemala
Blockade street	2.9	2.4	2.4
Invasde private property	2.0	2.0	1.8
Occupy factories/offices	2.6	1.9	1.9
Insurgency	2.0	2.0	1.8
Antisystem Scale	2.4	2.0	2.0

Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991-1992. ANOVA statistically significant $p < .001$ within categories and between countries.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors. When education is considered, there is no significant difference of mean scores among categories in any of the three countries. Support for protest is minimal and varies very slightly, with differences ranging from .1 to .5 within countries and with illiterates showing the highest levels of protest approval in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Educational differences do not appear to have the impact in Central America that they do in Peru or that Dalton (1988: 68-70) found in Great Britain, West Germany, and France. If age is considered, there is the expectation that protest levels will be highest among the youngest voting-age respondents, that is, those in the 16-19, and 20-29 groupings (roughly equivalent to the age of high school and university students). Unlike the "life cycle" pattern of variation in participation by age that was found in conventional types of behavior like voter turnout (Seligson and Booth, 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba and Nie, 1972), protest behavior tends to cluster among the youngest groups in society. The same pattern found elsewhere in Latin America and Europe prevails in the three Central American cases under consideration. Older people (60-90) are the most inactive in the unconventional participation mode.¹⁷ The highest mean scores of support for protest are found in the first age category. However, the differences in scores are less than half a point, and the strength of the impact of age on protest approval is not great.¹⁸

Since there are problems with the comparability of income data in the three cases, income's impact on protest approval is considered for Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala separately. In no country are the mean levels of support for protest statistically significant (Table 1.2), nor is there a consistent pattern of protest by income across the three countries.¹⁹

Table 1.2
Mass Support for Protest by Monthly Income: Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala (mean scores, 1-10)

Monthly income	Nicaragua		El Salvador		Guatemala	
	Income	Protest	Income	Protest	Income	Protest
1	C\$ 100-150	2.8	C. <720	1.8	Q. <300	2.0
2	151-299	2.5	721-1000	1.9	300-600	1.8
3	300-499	2.4	1001-2000	2.3	600-1000	2.0
4	500-699	2.1	2001-3000	2.0	1000-2500	1.7
5	700-800	2.2	3001-4000	2.2	>2500	1.5
6	>801	2.2	4001-5000	1.7	n.a.	n.a.

Source: University of Pittsburgh Public Opinion Project, 1991-1992; differences of means insignificant, both within countries across income categories and across the three countries. At the time of the surveys, the exchange rates were: Nicaraguan Córdoba, US\$1=C\$5; Salvadoran Colones, US\$1=C6.2-6.4; Guatemalan Quetzales, US\$1=Q5-5.2.

Social-Psychological Factors: Efficacy. Since education, age, and income had a modest influence on levels of protest, it is worthwhile to consider social-psychological factors. As has been argued since the initial discussion of *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba, 1980), the presence of high feelings of efficacy among respondents is associated with increased participation, both conventional and unconventional modes and types of citizen action. The results suggest that this is also the case in these three Central American cases. The differences of mean levels of support for protest behavior vary significantly (<.001) by levels of efficacy, yet only in Nicaragua does the difference in protest levels between respondents with high and low efficacy exceed 1. As in the case of socioeconomic variables, there is slight, unimpressive support for the hypotheses.²⁰

Political Factors: Tolerance and Ideology. Seligson and Booth (1993: 786-788) discovered that, when comparing 1991 data (reanalyzed in this chapter) with a 1989 survey, levels of political tolerance may vary based on opportunistic or contingent reasons. FSLN supporters ranked low in tolerance levels when their party controlled the national government, while UNO (Union Nacional Opositora) supporters were highly tolerant in their status as opposition. After the FSLN became the opposition in the wake of the 1990 elections, UNO supporters of the Chamorro government became highly intolerant, and respondents who favored the FSLN reported the highest tolerance scores, the inverse of the patterns prevailing in 1989. Mass political tolerance in an unstable country with little democratic tradition may vary widely based on instrumental calculations rather than the adherence to deeply held values and norms.²¹ Such fluctuations illustrate in a very dramatic way the ever-changing political context of these three countries, particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador. It is worth considering whether there is also a pattern of higher support for protest among more tolerant groups.

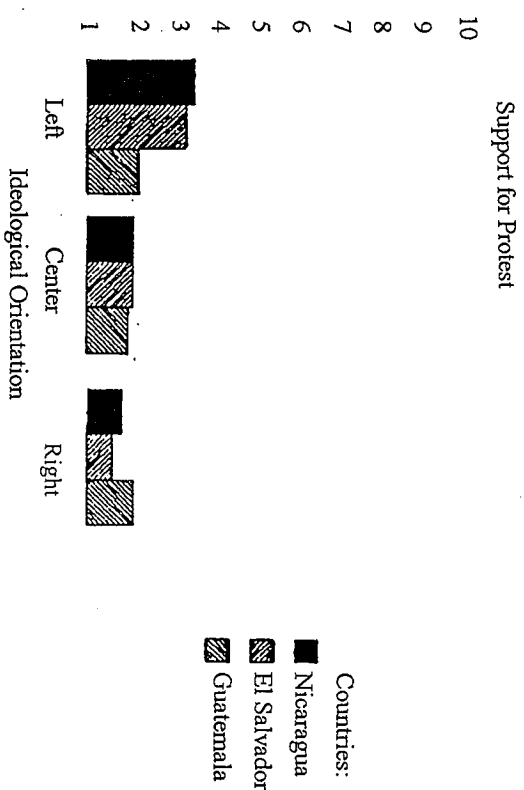
Tolerance differences found along partisan lines also apply for unconventional political participation.²² Those who are more likely to approve of blocking a street, seizing land, occupying buildings, and participating in violent

Table 1.3
Mass Support for Protest by Political Tolerance (mean scores, 1-10)

Tolerance	Nicaragua			El Salvador			Guatemala		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Low	1.7	2.5	2.9	1.7	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.4
Medium	1.7	2.5	2.9	1.7	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.4
High	1.7	2.5	2.9	1.7	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.4

Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991-1992. Mean scores within countries are statistically significant (ANOVA) at p<.001 for Nicaragua and Guatemala, and p<.002 for El Salvador.

Figure 1.1
Unconventional Participation: Four-Item Scale by Political Ideology



Note: numbers represent mean scores; means within each country, sig ANOVA $F < .001$

Source: University of Pittsburgh Public Opinion Project, 1991
author survey of Nicaragua priests, 1993-1994.

antisystem groups are also more likely to be politically tolerant (see Table 1.3). The differences in mean scores are greater than they were for either socioeconomic or psychological variables.²³

A related political variable that was expected to have an impact on protest approval levels was political ideology, with the notion in mind that leftists tend to be overrepresented among antisystem participants (Carrion, 1993: 69-72). If we examine the patterns found in Nicaragua and El Salvador as seen in Figure 1.1, the pattern that emerges from the data is just as was anticipated. Leftists are nearly twice as supportive of protest action as rightists, with ideological moderates displaying a middle ground in their approval of protest behavior.²⁴

In Guatemala, curiously enough, there is almost no variation in protest along the political ideology continuum. Should we conclude that ideology has no impact on predicting protest in that country? Considering the limitations and contextual understanding of Central American survey research, an equally plausible alternative is that respondents did not answer the ideology or protest items with total candor. Carrion's (1993: 137) data set contained measures of approval for protest and past participation in actual protest behavior, and he discovered substantial underreporting of acts committed. Bollinger (1992) found that highly reliable results and low response rates most often prevailed in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, while in El Salvador, nonresponse rates and respondent distrust were higher, making conclusions based on survey research there more problematic. One might see the same phenomenon in action for the case of Guatemala.²⁵

Religious Explanations

Religious Factors: Denomination, Religiosity, and Fundamentalism. The previous analysis has discussed all of the socioeconomic, psychological, and political independent variables and found that while there are statistically significant differences in means by age, efficacy, tolerance, and ideology, the impact of these factors is limited. The focus of this chapter on religious variables will have been justified only if they can do a better job of explaining variations in protest approval levels. Denomination has been the variable that sociologists and political scientists have most frequently (and unsatisfactorily) employed to indicate the impact of religion on political attitudes and behavior. If we compare the three countries, the differences are not significant for Guatemala, but they are significant for Nicaragua and El Salvador.²⁶ In no instance are the mean score differences between religions greater than 1 point on the 10 point scale. Only comparing those with no religion and the four denominational categories in Nicaragua (practicing, nonpracticing Catholics, Protestants, and others), do we find a difference of 9-1.5 points. As I have argued elsewhere (Stein, 1992, 1995), religiosity and fundamentalism might be better angles from which to consider the impact of religion on political attitudes and action (in this case, participation).

It was hypothesized that those who are more religious in terms of frequency of church attendance and personal prayer would rank lower in their approval of aggressive political participation. Table 1.4 shows statistically significant differences in the mean protest scores for both measures of religiosity.

If we consider Table 1.4, the general patterns in the data confirm the expectation of the earlier hypotheses. There is a monotonic relationship between religious observance (church attendance and prayer) and an aversion to protest. In

Table 1.4
Mass Support for Protest by Religiosity: Church Attendance and Prayer
(mean scores, 1-10)

Attend Church/month	Prayer	Nicaragua		El Salvador		Guatemala	
		Church	Pray	Church	Pray	Church	Pray
16-30	Daily	1.7	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.9	1.9
10-15	Weekly	1.3	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.9	2.1
5-9	At times	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.1	1.9	2.3
1-4	Never	2.4	3.1	1.9	2.7	2.0	2.5
0		2.6	n.a.	2.3	n.a.	2.0	n.a.

Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991-1992. For Church attendance, means within categories for each national sample are not statistically significant for Nicaragua and Guatemala, and are significant (ANOVA) at $p < .01$ for El Salvador. On the Prayer measure, differences in means within countries are significant in all three cases (Nicaragua, $p < .001$; El Salvador and Guatemala, $p < .01$).

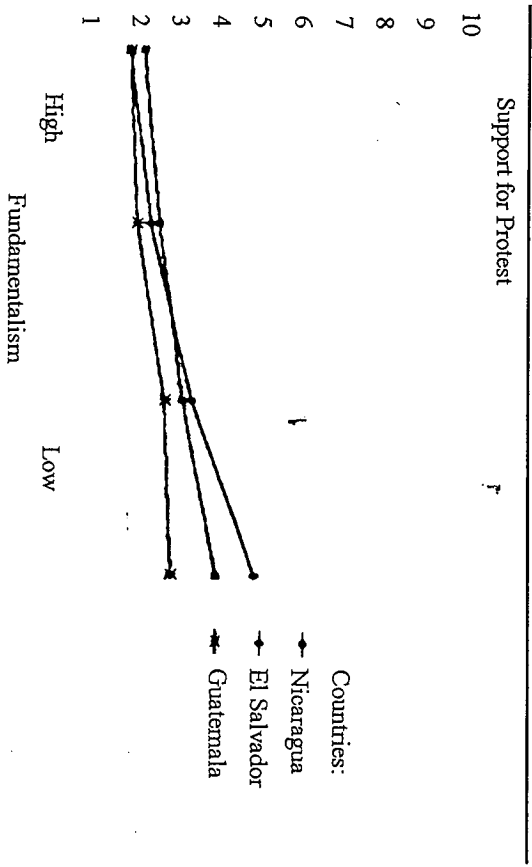
Nicaragua, those who attend church services more are less likely to protest, while in the other cases, such a relationship is not clear. For all three cases, those who pray most frequently are also least likely to approve of protest behavior.

A third way of looking at religion and politics in survey research has been fundamentalism.²⁷ If we take three measures well established in the American politics literature as measures of religious fundamentalism—biblical inerrancy, rigidity in belief of one path to afterlife, and the salience of religion²⁸—the most dramatic results of the analysis come into view. The first two beliefs are not associated with progressive Catholic lay movements like the CEBs, but that group exists in only one out of every five parishes in the country, and in six of the eight dioceses there has been no effort to encourage their expansion.

In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, using Biblical inerrancy as a measure (see Figure 1.2), fundamentalism responses predict the largest differences in mean protest approval of any variable considered so far. In El Salvador, the difference between means for those at the opposite ends of the fundamentalist response ranges as high as 3 points on the 10-point scale, and in all cases, the differences are significant.

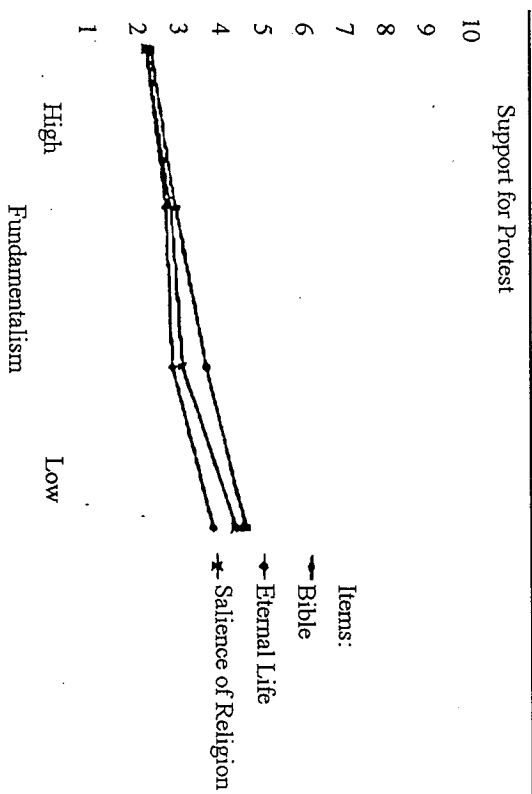
Examination of the Nicaraguan mass sample shows that all three measures of fundamentalism yield the same pattern in variations of approval for political protest (see Figure 1.3). In an earlier study, I found that religious fundamentalism also predicted variation in levels of political tolerance and partisanship

Figure 1.2
Unconventional Participation: Four-Item Scale by Fundamentalism (Biblical Inerrancy)



Note: scores are means; differences between categories in each country are sig. $p < .001$
Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991–1992.

Figure 1.3
Unconventional Participation in Nicaragua: Four-Item Scale by Religious Fundamentalism



Note: numbers are mean scores; $p < .001$ between categories for all three items.
Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991.

(Stein, 1992). In Nicaragua, the statistically significant differences in means by fundamentalism held up for all three measures when controlling for sex, age, education, income, efficacy, tolerance, ideology, and frequency of prayer.

Nicaraguan Masses in Comparison to Nicaraguan Clergy. During the insurrectionary phase (1977–1979) of the revolution that toppled Somoza, it was argued that Catholic priests and Nicaraguan Catholic laity (and some Protestants) were mobilized in support of the guerrilla war on the basis of religious motivation (Dodson and O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Smutko, 1981). Therefore, it is worthwhile to compare the Nicaraguan mass public (particularly, Nicaraguan lay Catholics) with priests to see how the two compare in their levels of support for protest behavior. It was assumed that priests would exhibit less support for protest on the basis of their status as positional and educational elites and due to their preference to settle conflicts by reconciliation rather than by violent means.

As is evident in the Table 1.5, self-identified practicing Catholics—those presumably most exposed to the social and political cues of the parish priests—exhibit mean protest scores lower than those for the Nicaraguan mass public as a whole and also than their self-identified unobservant fellow Catholics. The most important inference that can be gained from these data is that in the present context of Nicaragua in the 1990s, neither practicing Catholics nor the clergy are disposed to protest. This is a strong contrast with the extreme circumstances

Table 1.5
Support for Protest in Nicaragua: Priests and Masses (means, 1-10)

Action	Priests		Masses		Practicing Catholics	Non-Practicing Catholics
Blockade street	2.6	2.9	2.6	2.6	3.1	3.1
Invade private property	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.2
Occupy building	1.6	2.6	2.2	2.2	2.6	2.6
Insurgency	1.8	2.0	1.9	1.9	2.1	2.1
Antisystem Scale	1.8	2.4	2.1	2.1	2.6	2.6

Source: University of Pittsburgh Public Opinion Project, 1991; Author survey of Nicaraguan priests, 1993-1994. The difference of means between the two samples is not statistically significant except for the item on building occupations (F significant at $p < 0.1$).

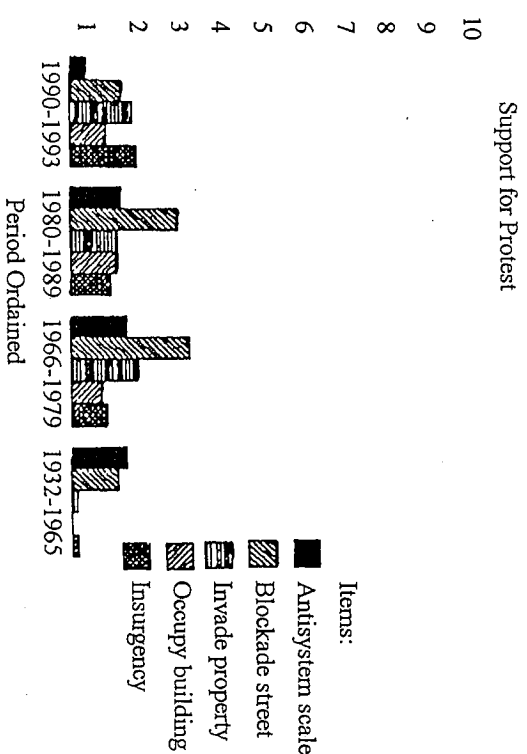
of the final two years of the Somoza dictatorship (1977-1979), when clergy provided shelter and protection to opponents of the regime, and some lay activists in urban slums and remote rural areas openly collaborated with the Sandinista Front guerrilla fighters. Context matters much for understanding the disposition to protest.

The first basis for comparison is on the socioeconomic level. The income variable in the mass sample was not in the priest sample. The two demographic or social independent variables common to both samples are education and age. If we consider the likelihood of protest approval by educational level, there is virtually no variation by educational level in the mass public (consistently low at about 2.0), while with the priests, increases in the educational level lead to even less support for protest (close to 1, the lowest possible point on the scale). Though the mass levels of support for protest are higher than they are for priests, the differences are not significant for all priests.

If we analyze protest by age, we should expect the largest differences in mass-elite approval, since the youngest cohorts in the mass sample were shown to be the respondents who most favored protest action.

An example of an act of unconventional participation that has been quite common in Nicaragua is blockading streets (be it by use of tires or barricades made of paving blocks, a practice common since the 1970s). While young people in the mass sample show more than twice the approval rating for this protest action than do their contemporaries among the youngest priests, not all priests show a lower level of support for protest than their age group in the mass public. It is likely that as in the case of political tolerance levels (see Stein, 1995a for a full discussion of this point), generational differences do exist between priests that lead to differences in their levels of support for protest. Since age had minimal impact on protest approval in the mass sample, it is likely that the impact of age is spurious, and it is masking another factor. Such a factor may be differ-

Figure 1.4
Unconventional Participation: Parish Priests in Nicaragua by Year of Ordination



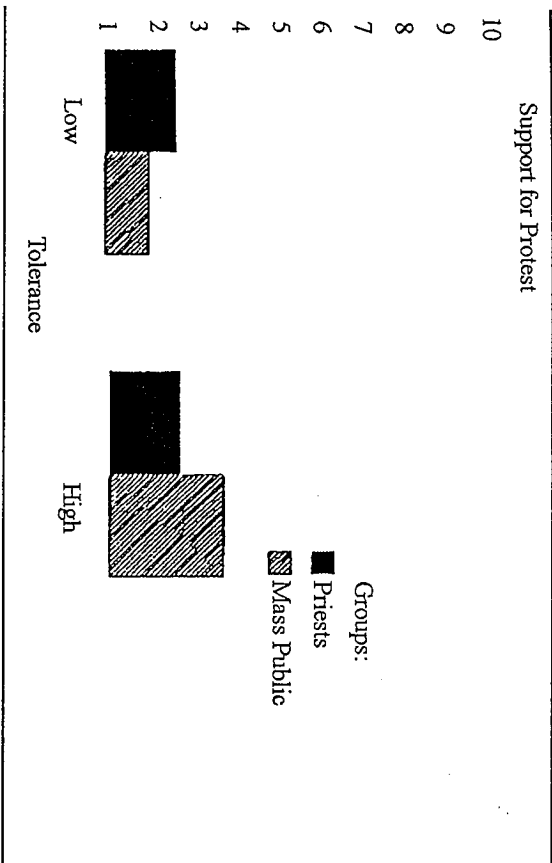
Note: numbers are mean scores; differences between cohorts are sig. $p < .001$.

Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991; author survey of parish priests, 1993-1994.

ences in personal experience and socialization among priest cohorts ordained before and after the Sandinista-led revolution in 1979. It was hypothesized that priests in the age group 40-59 (ordained in the period, 1966-1979) would demonstrate the highest levels of support for protest. This was indeed the case.

As was clear to the author during the process of interviewing, any kind of protest behavior is seen by priests as a last resort, and certain types of action like the forceful takeover of buildings and participation in insurgency are seen as wholly illegitimate (see Figures 1.4 and 1.5).²⁹ In the case of acts like blockading streets or land invasions, most priests showed low approval for such protest, but an important minority qualified their answers, saying that it would depend on the justice of the cause and what other means had been tried to resolve problems. A few priests said that in the face of unjust action by landowners or factory owners, land invasions or factory occupations could be justified. In any event, priests from the cohorts of 1980-1989 and 1966-1979 showed levels of approval for protest that were at least 1-1.5 points higher than did those Nicaraguans in the mass sample who prayed or attended church most frequently. These two groups of priests also showed higher levels of support for protest than those who said that they never attended church in a month or almost never prayed. The only group of the mass public that showed higher levels of support for blockading streets than the middle two priest cohorts were those

Figure 1.5
Unconventional Participation (Blockade Street): Religious Elites and the Mass Public in Nicaragua, by Political Tolerance



Note: numbers are mean scores; differences sig. $p < .001$.
Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, 1991; author survey of parish priests, 1993–1994.

respondents who strongly disagreed with the fundamentalism items. As in the case of political tolerance levels, it has been shown in this chapter that statements about priests' disposition toward protest behavior must be differentiated by socialization and experiential factors that differ among generations.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Predictors of Protest for Mass Samples

If we consider the OLS regression results for the three mass samples—Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala—the coefficients range from R -squared of .18 for Nicaragua and .12 for El Salvador to a mere .06 for Guatemala. The underspecified nature of the equations must be acknowledged. Considering the sociodemographic predictors, education was not significant for Nicaragua or El Salvador and was for Guatemala (beta of $-.09$). The coefficient for age was strongly negative and significant in all three cases, meaning that the three Central American cases considered here conform with findings almost everywhere else in Latin America and the industrial democracies, that protesters are overwhelmingly young. Income was not a significant predictor in any of the three cases, nor was efficacy.

If we move to consider the relationship between political variables and support for antisystem or unconventional participation, system support is statistically significant and negatively associated with support for protest, as is ideology (meaning, with a 1–10, left-right scale, that leftists are more prone to protest). There is a positive relationship in Guatemala between support for the suppression of democratic liberties and support for unconventional participation.

Turning now to religious explanations of protest, denomination, support for the Preferential Option for the Poor, and church attendance were not significant in any of the three cases. The fundamentalism items—literal belief in the Bible, belief in one true religion, and salience of religion—were all significant in each country. In Nicaragua, the beta weights for these same items were equal to, or larger than, those of any factor except for tolerance and political ideology. In El Salvador fundamentalism was the strongest predictor of mass protest, and for Guatemala, only tolerance and support for the suppression of civil liberties were stronger predictors of protest than fundamentalism. It appears that fundamentalist attitudes are one of the strongest predictors of the factors that inhibit approval for protest.

Predictors for Masses and Priests in Nicaragua

When regressions were run for the priest sample (fewer than 60 cases), only length of time in parish was significant (at $p < .07$). However, tolerance is not a significant predictor of protest for the priests. Measures of ideology and system support were not included in the priest study, but when the priests are divided by native-born and foreign-born, in the former subsample, attitudes toward conventional participation are a significant predictor (negative) of protest. Dummy variables were included to account for factors like diocesan/religious priest differences and for Nicaraguan/foreign, and yet neither of these variables was significant.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown that religion does indeed have an impact on protest politics and that undifferentiated statements about differences between priests' and the mass public's attitudes toward unconventional political participation are too general and of little analytical value. It must be said that religious factors (though not necessarily support for progressive Catholicism) were much stronger determinants of differences in support for protest than social-demographic or psychological factors and were second in their impact on levels of support for protest to political factors like ideology, tolerance and support for the political system. However, the absence of certain religious attitudes (biblical inerrancy, doctrinal rigidity, and salience) and practices (frequent church

attendance and prayer) was the strongest predictor of approval for unconventional participation.³⁰ Another issue is whether priests' disposition toward protest is at all related to that of Catholics with whom they most often have contact and communicate-active parishioners in the parishes. In a general sense, there is a repudiation of protest politics (particularly those forms that may result in violence) by the clergy and the general public. This may suggest a waning of the power of progressive Catholicism in Nicaragua. However, such negative attitudes are even stronger among highly religious laypersons and the youngest and oldest two of the four priest cohorts. In the mass surveys, 25-40% of respondents in Nicaragua and El Salvador mentioned the impact of previous violence on their personal lives, in terms of relatives killed, or family members who either became refugees or had to leave the country.³¹

Many priests voiced the opinion that violence produces a cycle that brings only more violence, and that the past 15 years of violence had led to nothing but a worsening of the situation of the country.³² In other words, the survey results cannot be interpreted in a vacuum, but rather in the context of these three countries. Support for protest may have been far greater under more repressive regimes such as those of Somoza Debayle (1967-1979), the military junta in El Salvador (1979-1982), or during the Lucas García (1978-1982) and Ríos Mont (1982-1983) regimes in Guatemala.³³ The disposition for protest may also have been positively associated with the general growth of mass mobilization and guerrilla movements at the same time period. As Tarrow (1994) and Tilly (1978) have noted, protest tendencies and collective action undergo cycles of highs and lows, opportunity structures for collective action vary widely over time, and one cannot extrapolate from these statistics to future patterns, much less compare them to the context of the final years of the Somoza dictatorship, when the majority of the Church-inspired mass mobilization and revolutionary participation was said to have occurred.³⁴ Forochar (1989: 111) has characterized the religious mobilization on behalf of the Nicaraguan revolution in the following terms: "the evolution of a major sector of Nicaraguan Catholics from a politically ultraconservative, religiously superstitious and fatalist group to a combative opposition force."

This characterization seems to be too undifferentiated. As the previous analysis of the data has shown, and as Hourtari's and Lemercinier's (1990, 1989) studies of peasants and CEB members also demonstrate, the number of priests and lay Catholics in Nicaragua who supported protest and violent participation was probably a minority, and there was a diversity of opinion among both the public and the clergy with regard to the legitimacy and viability of protest participation.

As far as the possible linkages between politically activist, "progressive" priests' views and the views of Catholics are concerned, the evidence is weak.³⁵ This is not surprising, as previous research on socially activist clergy during the American Civil Rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests of the 1960s

and 1970s (Ammerman, 1981; Quinley, 1978: 7-20) has shown that clergy took political views that were opposed to those of, or at least were not as actively supported by, parishioners in their churches. Quinley also found that protest behavior (demonstrations and marches) was more common among the Protestant ministers he studied than was electoral mobilization, because the former was more closely tied with the issues of moral authority than was voting. More recently, American politics scholars have probed how church-based socialization, sermons, and clergy taking public political stances affect the laity (Welch and Luge, 1991). They found that the political effects of religious orientation are strongest when church teaching is clearest on a given area. In Nicaragua, there was a wide array of views within the Catholic clergy on what should be done at the end of the Somoza dictatorship, by what means the dictator should leave office, and what kind of government would replace him. Only in certain contexts at the parish level (in parts of the Atlantic Coast, Nueva Segovia, Estelí, and Managua) were the religious implications so clear as to have great impact over the decision to join the mobilization and insurrection against Somoza. It may often be the case in Central America as it was in the United States, that some "progressive," politically activist priests held views that were not reflective of the laity in their parishes.³⁶ On this point, Berryman has remarked:

The people's interpretation of Church activity is often less radical and more "religious" than that of priests and sisters: the standard positions of the evangelical churches and the conservative majority of Catholics were closer to the majority opinion than that of revolutionary or socially activist Christians. (1994: 182, 204)

Even if the number of priests supporting (or actually participating in) protest actions during the revolution was less than previously thought to have been the case, the fact that it occurred in multiple parishes of nearly every diocese in Nicaragua shows that it was an influential minority, as was the number of Catholic lay activists who partook in such activities. Key to levels of approval for protest action and linkages between priest communications and citizen actions are the prevailing political context and the receptivity of parishioners to the socially activist message. The fact that the present political context is one in which protest is seen to be highly undesirable and illegitimate (both for priests and for masses) does not mean that there are no conditions under which religion may lead to protest behavior in the future; rather, it suggests that such protest is infrequent and engaged in by a small minority and that there is great diversity of opinion among lay Catholics and Protestants and among Catholic priests regarding their support for unconventional participation.

Not only do present conditions work against a substantial impact by progressive Catholics on protest political participation, but priests' consideration of the unintended political consequences of their past actions may have led to them disavow such options.

NOTES

1. Langton and Rapoport (1976: 300–303) found in Chile that while religiosity did not inhibit political participation, it had “a powerfully confirming effect on the attempts of the political left to mobilize popular support”, and that, by implication, it reduced the likelihood of protest actions. In a later study, Langton (1986) reported that church attendance and a personal religiosity in Peru were negatively associated with protest behavior.
2. This does not include a discussion of how religious practices associated with progressive Catholics in Latin America influence voting behavior, self-help community organizations, or different types of pastoral movements, all of which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Stein, 1995). For a discussion of these points for Guatemala, see Chea (1988).
3. The literatures on revolution, guerrilla movements, and social movements (see Skocpol, 1994; Tarrow, 1994; Ganson, 1990; Jenkins, 1983) are beyond the scope of this chapter, and I do not presume to address issues in them except as they relate to interpreting the survey data and evaluating claims made about religion and collective action in Nicaragua during the revolution.
4. This is not to deny the historical minority trend within the Catholic clergy in Latin America in both the colonial and independence periods to mobilize poor people for protest. However, the nature and scale were unprecedented in the modern period.
5. The surveys were part of a six-nation study undertaken by the Central American Public Opinion Project at the University of Pittsburgh. Funding sources included the Howard Heinz Endowment, the Mellon Foundation, the Tinker Foundation, and the University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Latin American Studies. For a full description of the samples, see Seligson et al., 1995.
6. This survey included over 60% of the total universe of parish priests in the 197 parishes and eight dioceses of Nicaragua (see Appendix). Support for this field research was provided by the Tinker Foundation, the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Fulbright Commission.
7. Unconventional participation is measured by a scale based on four items. Respondents were shown a 10 point scale ranging from low to high, then were asked the extent to which they agreed with a list of four actions: (1) that people participate in the closing or blockade of streets; (2) that people invade private property; (3) that people take over factories, offices, or other buildings; and (4) that people participate in a group that seeks to overthrow an elected government by violent means.
8. Though this hypothesis is opposite of what has been observed in the industrial democracies (Dalton, 1988), the literature on Latin America (Dietz, 1992; Carrion, 1993) suggests that protesters are not the most well-off sectors of society.
9. Efficacy is measured by the Almond and Verba *Civic Culture* item, “It is not worthwhile to get involved in politics because one does not have any influence over government decisions anyway.” High efficacy is indicated by those who strongly disagree with the question. Though scholars since Gurr (1970) have pointed to relative deprivation as a cause of protest, there was no measure for this variable included in the survey.
10. For a detailed discussion of how political calculations and context can affect support for tolerance, see Seligson and Booth (1993).
11. For a discussion of the tolerance questions, see Stein (1995).

12. Political ideology is measured by a standard Left-Right 10-point scale in which the respondent’s position is based on self-identification.
13. For a discussion of denominational differences and their impact on patterns of participation see Stein (1992); Camp (1994).
14. Fundamentalism was tapped by following the practices of the NES surveys and American politics literature by addressing three aspects of the phenomenon: Biblical inerrancy, doctrinal certainty about Jesus Christ and the salvation of non-Christians, and the salience of religion in the respondent’s life.
15. This concept was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they agreed with the phrase, “The Catholic Church should give preference to the poor.”
16. At the Puebla meeting of the CELAM in 1979, the Latin American bishops denounced state terrorism and leftist violence, saying of the general use of violence “It is neither Christian nor evangelical” (CELAM, 1979: 148).
17. The scores for Panama and Costa Rica for this age category were 1.4 and 1.6, respectively.
18. When controlling for sex, income, and efficacy, the differences in means were significant at $p < .001$ for all three countries.
19. Carrion (1993: 101–103) points out that the socioeconomic status (SES) bias in participation levels found that the United States holds up inconsistently in cross-national comparisons, whether the other cases be European or Latin American.
20. The two measures used to tap interpersonal trust yielded mixed results. One questioning whether people are generally trustworthy, produced response patterns that were statistically insignificant in all three countries. The second question, whether people would take advantage of the respondent given the opportunity, yielded statistically significant means according to the response, but within-country means were not significant and varied between 0 and 2. Seligson (1979: 141–142) found that among Costa Rican peasants, respondents ranking high on both interpersonal trust and efficacy were the most likely to engage in unconventional types of participation, like squatting on others’ land. Controls by sex, age, and income showed that differences in means remained significant for all three countries ($< .001$ for Nicaragua and Guatemala for all three controls and El Salvador for income; $< .002$ for sex and age in El Salvador).
21. For an earlier statement of this argument, see Kling (1956).
22. A survey on a period of protest behavior in El Salvador by the IUDOP (1987: 21–30) shows that support for actions like strikes and the occupation of the cathedral in San Salvador varied substantially along partisan lines (by as much as 25 points, with the supporters of the leftist Coalition showing higher approval than either partisans of the Christian Democrats or the right-wing ARENA Party). For a discussion of how unconventional participation varies along party lines in a distinct context—Germany—see Finkel and Opp (1991).
23. When controlling for sex, age and efficacy, the differences in means remained statistically significant (at $< .001$) for all three controls in Nicaragua and El Salvador and at a lower level ($< .002$) in Guatemala.
24. Between countries the mean scores are statistically significant (ANNOVA, F) at $p < .001$. While the Left was more likely to protest, this may be based only in part on ideology. As Seligson and Booth (1993: 788) argue with regard to the Nicaraguan Left’s fluctuating levels of support for tolerance and participation before and after the 1990 election, “one’s position vis-à-vis power may be more important than political

philosophy [it may vary by] momentary need for fundamental civil liberties in order successfully to compete for office and power." Kling (1956) called this type of contextual behavior by power contenders in Latin America a struggle of "ins" and "outs" for the control of public office.

25. Stoll (1993: 176) captures this polarized political context in which survey respondents may hedge their answers. Referring to the peak violence of the early 1980s, one informant told him that "if you were Catholic, the army said you were a Communist." Building on the work of TUDOP (1987), Bollinger (1992) found that the nonresponse rate and distrust in El Salvador were most frequent among rural, poor, and uneducated respondents. Another factor to keep in mind is that the ideological spectrum of political party competition in Guatemala has never included a truly leftist legal political option since the 1954 coup.

26. In the former case, $p < .001$; for the latter, $p < .01$.

27. See Stein (1995, 1992) for a full discussion of this concept.

28. For a discussion of the concept of salience, see Guth and Green (1993).

29. Battalion (1993: 18) reports 88 cases of building occupations and 150 land invasions in the first two years of the Chamorro government. During this period, massive privatization of government-owned enterprises took place, and as recently as my period of field research in 1993–1994, multiple claims to land by pre-revolutionary owners, recipients of Sandinista land reform, and former contras (promised land as part of the peace settlement) led to intense conflict.

30. It would be a mistake, however, to equate nonfundamentalists with secular people and say that religion has no impact. There are Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, and people of other religions who have higher frequency differences between them on these items than the differences between people with a religious denomination and people with no religion. For example, in the three countries, Evangelical Protestants agree strongly 10–20% more than either self-identified practicing or non-practicing Catholics. For a full discussion of this see Stein (1992, and 1994). TUDOP (1987: 13) found in El Salvador that Catholics and respondents with no religion were similar in their support for dialogue as the solution to the 1980s civil war (51% and 45%, respectively), while Protestants in their majority (56%) said that "only God" could bring an end to the war.

31. Lower rates were reported in Guatemala. However, had these urban samples included more war zones and rural areas, the figures would have certainly been even higher in all three countries.

32. Levine (1981: 191–200) found that similarly, Colombian priests in the 1970s rejected violence based on their experiences in that country's civil war (La Violencia, 1948–1958), while Venezuelan priests were less likely to say that violence was an illegitimate and ineffective form of political participation.

33. On the point of how political context and repressive regimes are related to levels of protest, Ganson (1990: 73) has noted, "In a closed and oppressive political system that offers no nonviolent means for accomplishing change, the morality of violence is not as clear. But when it is believed that effective nonviolent alternatives exist, almost everybody would consider these morally preferable." For political and internal church factors that shaped the context of religious protest in Nicaragua, see Williams (1991).

34. Though protest levels have decreased from the peak of the civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, violence has continued in both countries (see Battalion, 1993).

35. Part of this weakness may be due to the limitations of the sample. My priest survey included a sampling frame of the entire universe of priests working in the 197 parishes and eight dioceses around the country and a list of 55 older priests or former priests active at the time of the insurrection against Somoza and the FSLN revolutionary government. However, there has undoubtedly been a high turnover of priests from those in the period 1979–1993, between the revolution and the time of the survey (particularly among foreign priests). Dodson and O'Shaughnessy (1990) report that in the first half decade of Sandinista rule, 1,900 priests and religious brothers spent some time in Nicaragua. After the 1990 election and conflicts with local bishops, many surely left and were unavailable at the time of the survey. For further details about the sample design see appendix.

36. Burdick (1990, 1993: 182–222) has also found a gap between the socially activist message intended by radical priests and the reception of it by lay Catholics in Brazil, according to their own socialization, position in the church, and personal class experience. Often the "liberationist" discourse provides new terms for old world views and patterns of action, and it accompanies a focus on charity rather than an aggressive pursuit of social and political rights.

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APPENDIX

Sample Design for Catholic Priests in Nicaraguan Parishes, 1993-1994

There are more than 300 priests in Nicaragua, including parish priests, other assistant priests who also work in pastoral programs, and clergy involved in Catholic schools, administration of the dioceses, international offices like CARRTAS, and instruction in the seminaries and universities (particularly the UNICA and the UCA). Given that I could not possibly interview all of these priests in the allotted time, I made the strategic choice to interview only parish priests (párrocos) and, to the extent possible, also speak with assistant priests in the parishes and with nuns. These priests and nuns are much more in daily contact with a wide variety of Nicaraguan Catholics in urban and rural areas, and they have more contact with the poor than do the priests in Catholic high schools, universities, and seminaries or diocesan administration. Since many parts of the study make explicit comparisons between the attitudes and declared behavior of the Catholic faithful and their clergy, it is most sensible to focus on the subset of priests most in contact with the parishioners where they live.

Constructing the sample frame was not an easy task, primarily because Nicaragua has undergone a substantial turnover in the makeup and size of its clergy in the past 25 years. Based on the information in the diocesan directories, I could not find the necessary information on which to draw a representative sample. Rather than stratify the sample myself by reputation (as was done by Chea, 1988), I decided to interview the entire universe of 203 priests now active in the dioceses and 197 parishes of the country. Due to transportation costs and limited time, I went personally to 110-120 parishes and sent the remaining questionnaires by mail. In each diocese I met initially with the bishop and/or diocesan vicar and obtained official permission to interview the priests in that particular diocese. Upon gaining permission, I requested a letter of introduction from the bishop and access to statistics on the number of parishes and number of priests active in pastoral work. In only one instance did a bishop hesitate to give me permission, and he added that I should return to meet with him after the priest interviews so that he could "correct" what they had told me. The receptivity by priests and bishops was high.

On the national level, more than two-thirds of the universe was interviewed. This level of response prevailed in five of the eight dioceses, with the response rate in two of the three most important dioceses—Managua and Granada, given their size of clergy and share of the national population—having more than 80% of the universe sampled. At the other extreme, in the dioceses of Estelí, Jinotega, and Matagalpa, the response rate was much lower. Part of this was due to my inability to travel to smalltown, remote, northern, parishes in person, given the constraints of time and money. Nonresponse, however, was the exception rather than the rule, and therefore, the degree of confidence for generalization of the patterns revealed in the survey data is quite high for the archdiocese and Granada, and substantial for the dioceses of León, Bluefields, and Jinagalpa, but minimal for Estelí, Matagalpa, and Jinotega.

Due to the length of the survey instrument administered in the priest interviews, not all batteries of questions could be covered with all clergy who consented to an interview. Therefore, it must be recognized that the items on protest participation from the priests' responses were taken from a subsample of priests who were willing to answer these

items at the end of the questionnaire. One might be tempted to argue that while the sample described is indeed representative, the priest data upon which this chapter is based are not. It is important to consider just how closely the characteristics of this subsample conform to patterns found in the larger priest sample. The comparisons between the two samples can be seen in Table 1.6.

As is evident, the general characteristics of this random subsample conform very closely to those of the entire sample, despite the low response rate on these particular series of items due to the length of the survey instrument. If anything, there is a slight overrepresentation of the younger two cohorts of priests, who, in fact, constitute nearly 45% of the total number of priests, and here are 58%. However, there is no substantial basis for questioning the generalization of the patterns found in the 69 cases (47.8% of the total) to the entire 142 cases.

Table 1.6
Comparison of Priest Cohorts by Defining Traits: Entire Set of Responses vs. Subset for Chapter (in percentages)

Trait by Group	1932-1965		1966-1979		1980-1989		1990-1993	
	cohort		cohort		cohort		cohort	
	n=45/14	n=34/14	n=29/21	n=34/19				
Cohort and share of total	A 31.7 S 20.6	23.9 20.6	20.4 30.9	23.9 27.4				
Diocesan priests	A 46.7 S 50.0	61.8 64.3	75.9 81.0	85.3 84.2				
Nicaraguan-born	A 28.9 S 21.4	52.9 57.1	75.9 81.0	94.1 89.5				
Fathers were peasants/workers	A 63.4 S 76.7	60.0 41.0	40.7 36.7	64.7 57.9				
Mean age	A 66.5 S 67.6	49.8 48.5	37.0 37.3	31.0 30.3				
Mean education	A 20.7 S 22.4	20.1 20.4	20.5 21.1	18.9 19.4				

Note: A = all 142 cases; S = subset of 69 cases.

Part II

Labor and Land Issues