

This chapter examines attitudinal factors which stimulate and inhibit political participation among the poor in Latin America. It seeks to determine the attitudes which are linked to unconventional political participation (in the form of squatting) among peasants. Previous research in the United States has found that the combination of low political trust (cynicism) and high political efficacy is most likely to produce alienated activist behavior. This finding is tested cross-culturally with data obtained from a survey of Costa Rican peasants. It is found that Costa Rican squatters have significantly higher levels of cynicism and efficacy than do either smallholders or landless peasants. While landless peasants are politically cynical, they feel politically powerless and hence tend not to embark upon land invasions to obtain land. Smallholders are found to be both trusting and efficacious and hence are likely to comprise the most stable element in rural society.

10. Unconventional Political Participation: Cynicism, Powerlessness, and the Latin American Peasant

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Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to utilize a theoretical framework for testing hypotheses related to unconventional political participation in the context of rural Latin America. One of the most dramatic manifestations of peasant unconventional participation is the land invasion. In most of Latin America, where the overwhelming majority of land is held by a tiny minority of powerful *latifundistas* (Barraclough and Domike 1970), groups of peasants, on occasion, develop sufficient organizational capacity to permit them to embark upon the course of land invasion (Petras and Zemelman 1972; Seligson 1974, pp. 163-83; Landsberger 1969; Stavenhagen 1970; Soles 1972). Such invasions must be considered a radical act of unconventional political participation because they challenge the dominant rural political power structure and provoke the threat of severe sanctions for the invaders. While three-fourths of all rural families in Latin America are landless, only on occasion do peasants resort to squatting.

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What is it about landless peasants who turn to squatting which makes them distinct from others who, in similar circumstances, do not? In order to answer this question it is helpful to consider a more general proposition: discontent alone does not an activist make. Many individuals are unhappy about their lot, feel that they have been exploited in their work, or resent government policies, but few are motivated to take action. William A. Gamson (1968) has suggested that a certain combination of attitudes is required to motivate individuals to political action. In particular, he has hypothesized that the combination of a high sense of efficacy and a low degree of political trust "is the optimum combination for mobilization. . ." (Gamson 1968, p. 48).

Other research in the United States has supported Gamson's hypothesis. Student activism during the Vietnam war protest days has been shown to have resulted from a combination of high efficacy and low trust (Block, Haan, and Smith 1973). Protest approval by a cross-section of the United States electorate has also been predicted by this combination of attitudes (Balch and Kellstedt 1975). Perhaps the most extensive support for the Gamson hypothesis comes from the evidence available on black participation in the urban riots of the 1960's. In an extensive review of the literature on this subject, James W. Clarke (1973) concludes that structural variables such as unemployment, low education, poor housing, etc., do not explain why some blacks participated in the riots and others did not, since, in the ghetto environment, these factors are more nearly constants than variables. Clarke finds that feelings of personal efficacy and lack of trust in government are the most important predictors; only those blacks who were *both* efficacious and distrustful of government were likely to riot.

Clarke (1973, p. 537), going beyond Gamson, has presented a more fully elaborated model of the relationship between these attitudes and protest behavior. A modified version of a figure presented by Clarke is shown in Figure 1. On the right-hand side of the figure are those individuals who trust government and who will be either "allegiant activists" or "allegiant apathetics," depending on whether they feel efficacious or powerless. These individuals are not prone to protest participation. On the left side of the figure are those with low trust, often referred to as cynics (Aberbach 1969; Miller 1974). The low trust (i.e., cynical) and low efficacy (i.e., powerless) individuals feel that their protest activity is unlikely to be effective. They are called the "alienated apathetics." The low trust/high efficacy individuals, on the other hand, believe that their actions will be noticed and are more likely to become involved in riots. They are termed the "alienated activists." Seen in this light, riot is the black ghetto dweller's rational means of attempting to have his demands satisfied; it is an effective, if costly, way of making the white community take notice of the ghetto's problems. Gamson (1971, p. 139) aptly puts it this way: "Rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means. It is not some kind of irrational expression. . . ."

The theoretical framework proposed suggests the hypothesis that those who have demonstrated political activism through land invasions (i.e., squat-

Figure 1. Hypothesized Relationship between Trust and Efficacy

| | | TRUST | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Cynical | Trusting |
| E F F I C A C Y | Powerless | ALIENATED ACTIVISTS | ALLEGIANT ACTIVISTS |
| | Efficacious | ALIENATED APATHETICS | ALLEGIANT APATHETICS |

ters) are those peasants who have a higher sense of efficacy than the average landless peasant and a stronger distrust of government than the average peasant.

What of the landed sector of the peasantry? The peasants comprising this group are individuals who are better off than their landless counterparts and, perhaps more importantly, have long-term economic security, which the landless do not (Seligson 1977b). In addition, landed peasants have a stake in their community far beyond that of landless laborers who may be frequently forced to change jobs and move to other communities owing to the scarcity of work. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that landed peasants are significantly more trusting and feel more efficacious than landless, non-squatting peasants. In this paper these hypotheses will be tested by comparing levels of trust and efficacy among the three categories of peasants just discussed.¹

Method

Subdata

The findings to be presented here are based on a survey of 531 adult male peasants conducted in Costa Rica in late 1972 and early 1973 (details can be found in Seligson 1974). Of the 531 respondents a total of 521 were categorized unambiguously into one of the three main types of peasants: 203 smallholders (i.e. titled and untitled owners), 263 landless peasants, and 55 squatters. For the purposes of this analysis the small group of tenants (renters and sharecroppers) are considered landless. These individuals own no land and hold usufruct rights only as long as the owner of the property is willing to let them farm. (Further details regarding this and related research on Costa Rican peasants can be found in Seligson 1972a; 1972b; 1974; 1975; 1977a; 1977b; 1978; 1979a; 1979b; forthcoming; Seligson and Booth, chapter 6; Booth 1975a; 1975b; Booth and Seligson 1979.)

Measurement Technique for Efficacy/Powerlessness

Before going on to examine the levels of cynicism/trust and efficacy/powerlessness that appear in the data, some discussion of the techniques that were used to measure these two attitudinal variables is necessary because they are being studied in relation to a culture vastly different from the one in which the standard indicators of trust and efficacy were developed.

In order to measure feelings of personal efficacy among peasants a scale should meet the following three criteria: (1) it must not be easily contaminated by social desirability, (2) it must permit the items to be salient for the respondent, and (3) it must be meaningful in a Latin American cultural context.

While the construction of a measure which meets all three of these criteria is quite difficult, I have devised a scale which promises to be an improvement over previous ones. I call the scale a "problem-solving efficacy index." Mathiason (1972) proposes that the efficacious person is one who is successful at three separate but related tasks. First, he must be aware of a problem; then he must know how to go about solving it; and, finally, he must do something about it. Mathiason's three conditions are used to develop the new scale.

There are several advantages the new approach offers over previous efficacy measures. With regard to the first criterion, the new instrument is not likely to be contaminated by social desirability -- i.e., since the questions are completely open-ended, the respondent is not likely to know what answer will please the interviewer. An obsequious peasant, for example, would not know if the interviewer wanted him to name a problem or was really more interested in not hearing any complaints. Moreover, a peasant who had no information could not possibly answer the question and, thus, could not emerge appearing efficacious.²

Another advantage concerns the second criterion -- the saliency of the items for the respondent. The Mathiason questions permit the respondent to set the context; thus, for the first time, the conceptualization of efficacy links together the concepts of information and action. Paige (1971) believes that information is a prerequisite to efficacious action. He argues that questions which are designed to tap efficacy typically presuppose that the respondent has information about the subject under discussion. In many cases this presupposition is erroneous, especially in peasant populations. Thus, it is imperative to find out whether or not the respondent is informed about a particular issue since, without a certain (undefined) minimum of information, rational action designed to change that situation is presumably impossible. The Paige approach, however, is to have the respondent provide a particular piece of information on a theme set by the interviewer (e.g., the race of local and national political figures), whereas the Mathiason technique (and the one followed here) is to permit the respondent to set his own theme within broad guidelines. The lack of precise information about themes which are likely to be salient to Latin American peasants encourages the use of the open-ended Mathiason approach. Thus, while both Paige and Mathiason see the posses-

sing of information as central to the notion of efficacy, Mathiason's open-ended approach, which permits the respondent to set the context of the questions, better satisfies the second criterion for a meaningful scale for this study.

The "problem-solving efficacy scale" furthermore, goes far in meeting the third criterion established: the questions must be meaningful in the Latin American context. Since the respondent has set the context of the question, the researcher can assume that the problems of cross-cultural transferability have been minimized.³ Added to the efficacy items is a measure of the respondent's knowledge of the names of the county councilmen, since in rural Costa Rica nearly all community problems require the intervention of the county government. The measure used was the percentage of councilmen correctly named (the percentage figure is necessary rather than the raw score because the number of councilmen varies depending upon the population size of the county). The actual questions used in the present study, along with the marginals, are presented in Table 1. Details of scale construction are contained in the Appendix.⁴

Measurement Technique for Trust/Cynicism

Political cynicism has been defined by Miller (1974, p. 952) as the "degree of negative affect toward the government and is a statement of the belief that the

TABLE 1
EFFICACY QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Introduction: "All villages have problems, that is, things which make life difficult for the people."

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|---------------|-------|------------|-----|
| Q 1 | What is the most serious problem in this village, that is to say, of _____? (name of village in which interview is conducted, unless respondent has indicated, from a previous question, that he has been living there for less than 3 months; in that case reference is made to his previous home.) | Problem named | 63% | No problem | 37% |
| Q 2 | How did this problem arise? | Answer | 60% | No answer | 40% |
| Q 3 | How would you go about solving this problem? | Answer | 56% | No answer | 44% |
| Q 4 | Do you think that you could do something to solve it? | Yes | 35% | No | 65% |
| Q 5 | Do you know who the present councilmen of this county are? | Mean correct | 16.3% | | |

.93 = coefficient of reproducibility

.77 = coefficient of scalability

government is not functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations." The central difficulty with measuring political cynicism among peasants arises once again from the problem of social desirability. A peasant who answers a questionnaire item with a cynical response is, in effect,

TABLE 2

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Introduction: "Now we're going to talk about government. Not only the present government, but all the governments you have seen in the country."

Varimax Factor

Loadings

| | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| .71 | Q 1 | <p>Would you say that governments^a are interested in solving the problems of the <i>majority</i> of the Costa Ricans, or are they interested only in the problems of <i>some important</i> families?</p> <p>The majority 36.9%, some families 61.0%, d.k. 2.1%.</p> |
| .69 | Q 2 | <p>Do you think that what the governments do <i>helps</i> you, <i>hurts</i> you or neither <i>helps nor hurts</i> you?</p> <p>Helps 24.1%, neither 42.2%, hurts 33.3%, d.k. .4%</p> |
| .68 | Q 3 | <p>Would you say that the governments misspend a <i>lot</i> of the money that people pay in taxes, misspend <i>little</i> of the money, or misspend <i>some part</i> of that money?</p> <p>None 6.0%, little 13.2%, some 17.1%, lot 51.0%, d.k. 12.6%. (Note: Some respondents volunteered the "none" response; it was therefore included as a valid choice).</p> |
| .63 | Q 4 | <p>How often do you think that one can trust in governments to do the right thing? Do you think you can trust them <i>almost always</i>, <i>almost never</i>, or <i>sometimes</i>?</p> <p>Almost always 12.8%, sometimes 26.0%, almost never 59.9%, d.k. 1.3%</p> |
| .60 | Q 5 | <p>Do you think that among public servants, there are <i>many</i> who aren't honest, there are <i>some</i> who aren't honest, or there are <i>a few</i> who aren't honest?</p> <p>Few dishonest 42.4%, some dishonest, 18.8%, many 32.4%, d.k. 6.4%</p> |
| .57 | Q 6 | <p>If you were to get involved in a court case as the accused, do you think that you would be treated <i>justly</i> or <i>unjustly</i>?</p> <p>Justly 46.7%, unjustly 46.3%, d.k. 6.9%.</p> |

2.5 = eigenvalue

42.4 = % of Variance explained

^a See note 5 for explanation as to why the term "governments" was used.

criticizing individuals who are far wealthier, more highly educated, and more powerful than he, and is doing so to a complete outsider (the interviewer), who is writing down his answers. Since such a situation can be intimidating, great care must be exercised in obtaining this kind of information from peasants (Form 1974).⁵

The basic set of questions used to measure trust were drawn from the questionnaires of the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. The questions were modified to minimize problems of social desirability - each question was rephrased from its original yes/no format to one which presented the respondent with two or three alternatives. The questions as used in their final form, along with marginal percentages, and factor analysis loadings are presented in Table 2. The scale construction techniques are discussed in the Appendix.

Results

The results of the data analysis are presented in two parts. First, the analysis of the trust and efficacy attitudes is presented separately. Second, the joint effect of these attitudes is discussed in relation to the three types of peasants (smallholders, landless laborers, and squatters), who are categorized into their appropriate position in the Clarke model.

Figure 2 presents the results of the analysis of the trust scale. Those peasants whose mean trust score is above zero (the mean for a standardized variable) are placed into the "trusting" category and those with a score below zero are placed into "cynical" category. The relative position of the mean values of each peasant type is illustrated by the position of the points on the line.

Figure 2. Trust among Costa Rican Peasant Types

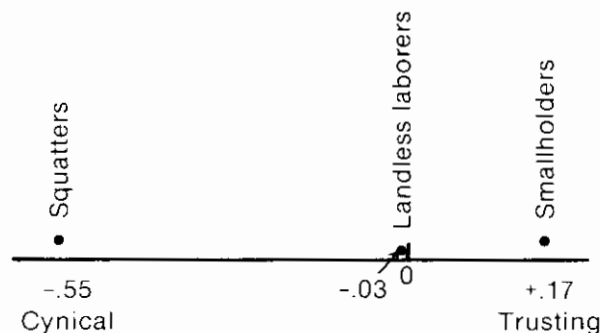
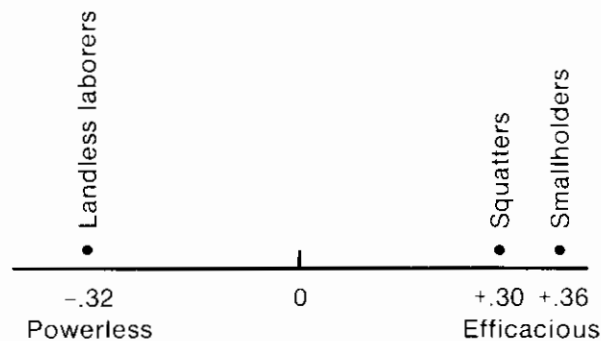


Figure 2 shows that trust is highest among the smallholders, drops among the landless laborers, and is lowest among the squatters. The differences among the means of the three groups are statistically significant (F ratio probability $<.001$) when a one-way analysis of variance test is applied to the data. A Duncan post hoc test (sig. = .05) reveals the means for the three groups are significantly different from each other.

The analysis of the efficacy scale is conducted in the same fashion that has been used to examine trust. Figure 3 displays the mean efficacy score of the three peasant types. The smallholders and the squatters are both highly efficacious in contrast to the landless laborers. A one-way analysis of variance on the efficacy indicator reveals a significant difference ($F < .001$). However, the Duncan post hoc test reveals that the difference between the squatters and smallholders as to levels of efficacy is not significant. Rather, only the difference between the landless laborers on the one hand and the squatters and smallholders on the other is significant.

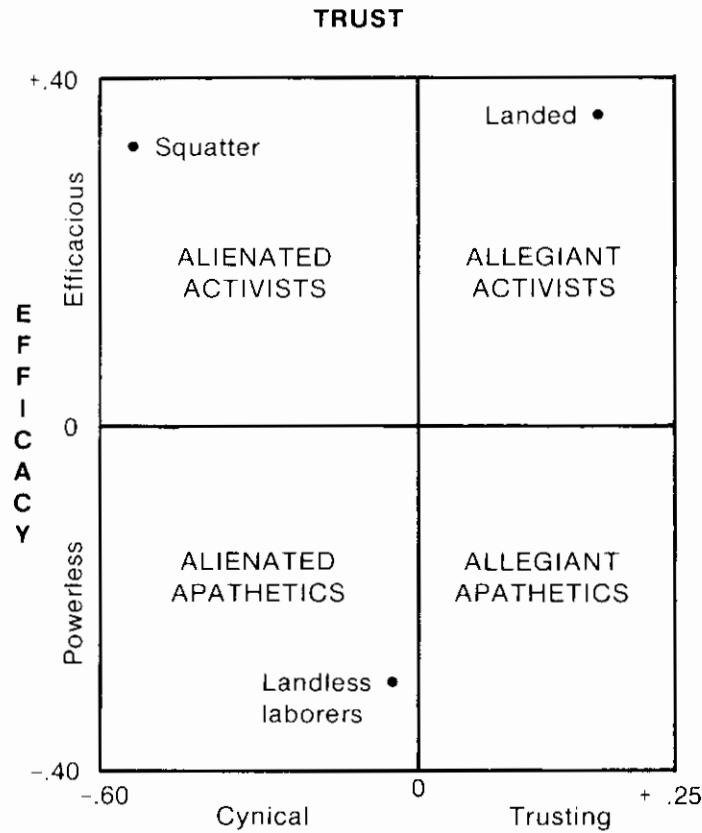
Figure 3. Efficacy among Costa Rican Peasant Types



Now that each land tenure type has been discussed with regard to its score on the trust and efficacy dimensions respectively, it is appropriate to turn to an examination of the relationship between these two dimensions in order to see where each group of peasants falls on the theoretical framework.⁶ Figure 4 displays the three types of peasants as located within the trust-efficacy framework.

Looking first at the category of alienated activists, it can be seen that only the squatters are both highly cynical and highly efficacious. The alienated apathetic category is populated by the landless laborers, who have shown themselves to feel both cynical and powerless (although the level of cynicism is

Figure 4. Trust and Efficacy among Costa Rican Peasants



not nearly as high as that of the squatters). Finally, the allegiant activist category is the one into which the smallholding peasants fall. No major category of peasants is apathetic allegiant.

It is not possible to determine if the attitudes of the squatters were changed significantly by the squatting experience itself or if they remained unaltered by it. The assumption is that it is the individual's strong sense of efficacy coupled with his distrust of government which motivates the squatting act rather than the opposite being the case. The act of squatting may heighten efficacy and cynicism, but if the earlier work by Gamson and Clarke suggesting the link between attitudes and behavior has any meaning, it could not be totally responsible for these attitudes.⁷

Conclusions

Using a theoretical framework based on scales of trust/cynicism and efficacy/powerlessness, which was formulated in a North American context, this study

has found that it holds true cross-culturally in Costa Rica. Specifically, the data show that among the three main groups of Costa Rican peasants, only the squatters demonstrate Gamson's "optimum combination for mobilization" — i.e., feelings of personal efficacy and distrust of government. Gamson, Clarke, and others who have examined the characteristics of "alienated activists" in the United States have concluded that people who commit political acts of protest are likely to exhibit this combination of attitudes. This study has shown that Costa Ricans who invade land are indeed both cynical and efficacious; thus, it offers cross-cultural support for the framework and an explanation as to why some peasants become squatters and some do not.

The present study has also shown where the other two groups of Costa Rican peasants fall within the theoretical framework. Smallholders are identified as "allegiant activists" (i.e., they demonstrate feelings of personal efficacy, combined with high trust in government); landless peasants, on the other hand, tend to be "alienated apathetics" (i.e., they reveal distrust in government combined with low feelings of personal efficacy).

The implications of these findings are quite clear. In Costa Rica, the bulk of the peasant population is landless. This means that the countryside is dominated by individuals who feel politically cynical and politically powerless when compared to the landed peasants. While such a situation is not a particularly desirable one from many points of view, it is not one which presents a serious threat to national stability; only a tiny minority of peasants are both cynical *and* efficacious. Only this minority is likely to embark upon land invasions or other forms of rural protest. However, many factors can intervene to change this situation. Perhaps the most important of these would be the potential impact of political organization. Landless peasants who, on an individual basis, feel politically powerless, may become involved in strikes and other forms of protest behavior upon being organized into peasant leagues. However, whether such a development would ultimately reward the peasant with a plot of land is an open question. Masses of cynical peasants, effectively organized into such leagues, have, at times, had a significant impact on rural stability as they had in the Northeast of Brazil in the early 1960's. However, recent attempts to deal with the problem of landlessness through land reform (see Seligson 1979a) have had some success and hence may prevent rural social mobilization in Costa Rica.

Appendix:

Attitude Scale Construction Techniques

The series of questions designed to measure personal efficacy has been analyzed using Guttman's scalogram method, and the items have been found to form a unidimensional cumulative scale (the coefficient of reproducibility is .93, and the coefficient of scalability .77). Each respondent has been assigned a Guttman scale score based on his responses to the items. The scores range from a low of 0 to a high of 5. These scores have then been standardized to make their later use in this paper more readily comparable with the trust

index. Three further checks on this scale were conducted. First the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was calculated and yielded a value of .89. The Guttman Split-Half Coefficient was .83. Finally, a factor analysis was run on the variables. A single factor (with an eigenvalue greater than 1) was produced with loadings which ranged from a high of .92 to a low of .69. This one factor explained 62% of the variance in these variables.

The six items used to measure trust were not constructed so as to form a cumulative scale and, thus, were not analyzed with the Guttman method. Instead, factor analysis was employed in order to determine the amount of common variance. The results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, the unidimensionality of the eight items in the trust scale is substantiated. The eight items were then subjected to a test of reliability and produced a Cronbach's Alpha of .78, a Guttman Split-Half Coefficient of .77, and a mean inter-item correlation of .31. Factor scores were used to assign a scale score to each respondent on the trust dimension.

Notes

1. An analysis of attitudes among Costa Rican peasants which explores different types of political participation (conventional and unconventional) as well as different measures of efficacy is contained in Seligson (1977c).

2. A. Eugene Havens (1964, pp. 91-92) graphically explains the problem of social desirability in the following way:

When the scale is administered to a rural population one waits with bated breath for the results in order to apply his test for reliability and internal consistency. His disappointment is paramount when he discovers that almost every item has been answered by every respondent in a similar manner. The respondent agrees with every item. There is no discrimination - every person agrees. The problem is relatively simple. Interviewers are instructed to develop rapport with the respondent. If he does develop rapport then etiquette demands that the host does not disagree with his guest. Therefore, every statement read is considered a reflection of the interviewer's opinion and the host must not disagree.

3. This transferability is limited, however, by the possibility that the process of naming local problems and discussing ways of dealing with them is not part of Latin culture. While this remains a possibility, it is an unlikely one; my experience with peasants and the experience of others (Booth, Mondol, and Hernández 1973) suggest that peasants do in fact discuss local problems and the ways for solving them.

4. A final advantage of the new approach, one which Mathiason himself does not point out, is that a series of questions such as the one proposed is an ideal example of a Guttman-type scale. As Nunally (1967), Scott (1969), and Robinson (1973) have demonstrated, many human behaviors do not fit into the model that Guttman had in mind in establishing his scale. Only those behaviors which are naturally characterized by a cumulative pattern are appropriate for Guttman scaling. The Mathiason questions fit this pattern in that we can assume that individuals who are unable to name a local problem would be unable to explain how the problem came about. Likewise, those who do not know what could be done about the problem are unlikely to have ever tried to resolve it. The fact that the items are of a Guttman-type is a major plus in their favor, since, if the actual data obtained pass the rather stringent tests established for evaluating such scales (coefficient of reproducibility and coefficient of scalability), then the researcher can be confident that he has a unidimensional scale.

5. The early pretests conducted in the field illustrate some of the problems encountered with this questionnaire. Respondents were read the customary introduction which asked them not to refer to any particular political party but to the government (*el gobierno*). Despite this introduction (or perhaps because of it), the respondents made direct reference to the party in power, and, therefore, their answers were almost solely conditioned by whether or not they were supporters of that party. Eventually it was discovered that the term "the government" was interpreted by the respondents as meaning the particular party in power. Only when the term "the governments" (*los gobiernos*) was substituted in the introduction did the respondent turn his attention to government in general.

A second problem detected in pretesting was that suspicion was evoked by this set of questions, although it was not clear how much distrust was being concealed. Although it was impossible to eliminate this problem completely, it was found that shifting the position of the trust questions from the beginning of the questionnaire to a position closely following the efficacy questions helped stimulate more frank responses. The reason for this, it is felt, is that the efficacy questions served to develop a closer rapport between respondent and interviewer because they encouraged the former to talk about his problems. At the end of the efficacy series most respondents were quite at ease and interested in the interview. The final version of the questionnaire moved the trust questions even further back, placing at the very beginning a series of sociolinguistic questions which were almost universally enjoyed by the respondents. Ultimately, however, it is necessary to recognize that a significant amount of cynicism may remain unrevealed in peasant samples.

The sociolinguistic questions elicited the local name for a particular item (e.g., "What are some of the grains you give to hens?") so that phonological variables could be recorded. Reports on that research are contained in Seligson and Berk-Seligson (1978) and Berk-Seligson and Seligson (1978).

6. The mean scores of each peasant type on the trust dimension appear to confirm the theory. These mean scores, however, may be deceiving, for while the mean of each type may indeed fall in the predicted order, (e.g., landed, landless, squatter) the trust scores of *individual* peasants may be different from what was predicted. In fact, it would be unreasonable to expect all smallholders to be more trusting than all laborers and, similarly, all squatters would not be expected to be more cynical than all of the other peasants. What needs to be determined is whether a statistically significant number of the smallholders are more trusting than the landless peasants and the squatters, and if a significant portion of the squatters are more cynical than the landed and landless peasants.

In order to make this determination the technique of discriminant analysis was employed (Cooley and Lohnes 1971). Discriminant analysis is a classification technique which identifies the probable group membership of each respondent based on the information contained in the discriminating variable or variables. In this case, the score each peasant obtained on the trust and efficacy indexes (the discriminating variables) are used to predict his membership in one of the three peasant type groups. It is possible to classify correctly 59% of the cases. This figure is statistically significant (Chi-square) at $<.001$ level, indicating a very low probability that the classification was simply random. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that the mean scores represented in Figure 4 do not distort individual differences in trust levels. It should be noted that since the groups differed greatly in size, it was necessary to make a Bayesian adjustment for the assignment of cases to the group in which they had the greatest probability of falling.

7. Land tenure has been the sole independent variable to be used in this study for the prediction of attitudes of trust and efficacy. In order to make certain that the relationships uncovered are not spurious (i.e., due to SES, not land tenure type), the variables of income (based on total cash income plus total estimated value of all crops produced) and education have been examined.

Examination of the data reveals no significant difference with regard to the education variable. However, there are significant (F ratio $<.001$) differences between the income levels of the three types. The squatters comprise the poorest group, with an average weekly income of 70 colones (less than \$10). The landless laborers earn an average of 142 colones, double that of the squatters. The landed peasants earn an average of 365 colones weekly—more than twice that of the landless peasants. (Such a high figure for the landed peasants is somewhat of a distortion, since there were

a few landed peasants who had a very high income, which inflated the mean. The 215 median figure for these peasants, however, is still relatively high).

Since these differences are significant, it is necessary to control for income in the examination of the relationship between peasant type and the attitudinal variables. This has been done by dividing the sample into two groups, those with incomes above it and those with incomes below it, and then re-running the analysis. The findings are quite clear: the same relationship between peasant type and the trust and efficacy variables which appeared earlier is again evident within each income group.