Introduction

1

From Civil War to Democracy

> Knaves will tell you that it is because you have no property that you are unrepresented. I tell you, on the contrary, that it is because you are unrepresented that you have no property.
>
> – English Chartist Bronterre O'Brien, 1846[1]

> From [the proletariat, peasants, and petty bourgeois], this [republican] constitution demands they should not go forward from political to social emancipation, from [the bourgeoisie] that they should not go back from social to political restoration.
>
> – Karl Marx, 1850[2]

As the civil war in El Salvador drew to a close, peasants allied with the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation, FMLN) throughout the province of Usulután raced to consolidate their claims to de facto property rights, enclosing occupied properties with barbed wire, taking over additional properties, and patrolling boundaries against the return of the erstwhile landlords. On January 29, 1992, thirteen days after the signing of the peace agreement that ended more than a decade of civil war, government forces arrested peasant leaders of the Cooperativa California in an effort to repossess the Hacienda California, a large and valuable property on the coastal plain that the cooperative had forcibly occupied six months earlier. Two days earlier, militant peasants occupying a nearby property had been evicted and twelve leaders arrested. In addition, two were hospitalized (as a result of excessive force by government troops, according to United Nations observers). In response to the arrests, FMLN field commanders

[1] Plummer 1971: 177. [2] Marx 1964: 69–70.

slowed the movement of their forces to the designated cease-fire areas in several areas of Usulután – an action that posed a significant threat to the closely choreographed separation of armies under way at the time – until arrested peasant leaders were released and further eviction attempts suspended. Undeterred by arrests and evictions, peasants continued to occupy further properties.

With the military and logistical support of many peasants through the years of the civil war, the FMLN had fought government forces to a stalemate. Beginning in 1990, government and guerrilla negotiators hammered out the terms of a peace agreement to end the war and to found a democratic regime, which included the legalization of the FMLN as a political party, civilian control of state security forces, and electoral reform. On March 20, 1994, members of the Cooperativa California voted in the nation's first inclusive elections, marking the country's transition to political democracy.

Similarly in South Africa, decades-long political mobilization by black workers and the unemployed demanding political rights and economic resources forced recalcitrant elites to negotiate a transition to democracy in order to end civil strife. A wave of unprecedented strikes by black workers in the early 1970s and the spread of protest by township residents after the shooting of schoolchildren in Soweto in 1976 had been met with repression as well as measures to reform apartheid without extending universal suffrage. Trade unionists took advantage of reform measures to build a militant trade union movement that demanded political emancipation as well as economic concessions. From mid-1984 to mid-1986, the townships again erupted in a wave of protest; only the imposition of a severe state of emergency in 1986 and the arrest of tens of thousands of activists of the United Democratic Front (UDF) quelled the uprising. As a result of the repression, increasingly restrictive international economic sanctions were imposed. As the government appeared unable or unwilling to address the crisis, growing numbers of business executives and Afrikaner intellectuals initiated contact with the African National Congress (ANC) to discuss transition scenarios. After President F. W. de Klerk released ANC political prisoner Nelson Mandela and revoked the banning of the ANC and the allied South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1990, negotiations between the ANC, the governing National Party, and other political parties led to the first inclusive elections in April 1994.

In these unequal societies, elites long opposed democratization not only for the usual reason – that the many might expropriate or heavily tax the

wealth of the few – but because the economic privileges of the elite depended on state-enforced procedures unlikely to be sustainable under democratic rule. In South Africa, these measures included strict controls on the mobility of labor, reliance on highly regulated foreign migrant labor, fiscal priorities that sharply favored elite interests, and the exclusion of the majority from suffrage; in El Salvador, they included the torture and disappearance of labor activists and sometimes their families by death squads allied to state security forces and paramilitary groups, coercive workplace practices that long prevented any labor organizing, and close local alliances between landlords and representatives of the state that preempted political organization in the countryside. Elite recalcitrance in the face of rising political and economic claims by workers for effective political inclusion and adequate economic participation brought El Salvador to civil war and South Africa to its brink.

This book addresses two related puzzles. What accounts for the transition to democracy in South Africa and El Salvador after decades of elite opposition to democratic participation and electoral contestation by subordinate classes? And why were these civil conflicts amenable to negotiated resolution, in contrast to other civil wars whose resolution through negotiation appears so elusive?

The answer to the first puzzle, I argue, is that democracy in both countries was forged from below by the sustained insurgency of lower-class actors. Once-unyielding elites in South Africa and El Salvador conceded democracy because popular insurgency, although containable militarily, could not be ended, and the persisting mobilization eventually made compromise preferable to continued resistance. In contrast to the transitions in many countries where mobilization by the poor played a lesser role – Spain, Brazil, and many others – in South Africa and El Salvador the timing of the transitions, the split among elite factions between those supporting and those opposing the transition, the political actors who negotiated the transition, and the nature of the compromises that led to democracy were all forged through insurgent mobilization. My central claim in response to the first question then is that the transition to democracy would not have taken place in either country when it did, as it did, and with the same consequences in the absence of sustained popular mobilization.

Two processes together make up this *insurgent path* to democracy. First, sustained mobilization eventually constituted the leadership of the popular opposition as an *insurgent counter-elite*, by which I mean representatives of economically subordinate and socially marginalized actors that are a

necessary party to negotiations to resolve an enduring crisis of the political regime. This insurgent counter-elite is "elite" only in the strictly limited sense of being a necessary party to the negotiations if the ongoing conflict is to be durably resolved. Second, the accumulating costs of the insurgency (and the various counterinsurgency measures) transformed the core interests of economic elites, eventually convincing substantial segments that their interests could be more successfully pursued by democratizing compromise than by continued authoritarian recalcitrance. As a result, these economic elites pressed regime elites to negotiate, changing the balance of power within the regime between those willing to consider compromise and those resolutely opposed.

In answer to the second puzzle, together these two processes forged the political and structural bases of compromise, with the result that the two conflicts proved amenable to negotiated resolution via a transition to democracy. These class-based conflicts differed from many civil wars in that the contending forces were economically interdependent. Even in South Africa, where racial and ethnic identities were extremely salient, class and race coincided to a remarkable degree because of decades of apartheid policies. Once insurgency transformed elite interests away from their reliance on coercive institutions, the economic interdependence of key antagonists enhanced the returns to resolution of the civil strife: income from joint production would no longer be lost due to strikes, boycotts, sabotage, sanctions, and guerrilla attacks. As a result of the economically unequal and politically exclusive nature of Salvadoran and South African societies, a particular political bargain was possible. If institutions credibly promising a mutually satisfactory distribution of the benefits of compromise could be fashioned, insurgents would accept political inclusion at the cost of economic moderation (principally a commitment to economic liberalism), while economic elites gained constitutional protection of the status quo distribution of wealth in return for accepting electoral and other forms of democratic competition as the terrain on which they would henceforth pursue their interests.

Labor-Repressive Institutions and Recalcitrant Elites in Oligarchic Societies

Both South Africa and El Salvador were what I term *oligarchic societies*: societies in which economic elites rely on extra-economic coercion of labor by the state for the realization of incomes superior to those possible under

more liberal, market-based arrangements. Thus oligarchic societies are those in which the dominant labor relations are what Barrington Moore Jr. (1966) termed "labor-repressive." By *economic elites* I mean those individuals who by virtue of their control of the means of production attain significant income and social status. By *regime elites*, I mean those individuals whose power depends on their occupation of state (and government) offices. *Extra-economic coercion* may be contrasted with the market discipline of labor: in a market-based economy, a worker who demands too much pay or does too little work runs the risk of becoming unemployed or unable to pay freely contracted debts. Excess supply in labor markets and limited borrowing opportunities in credit markets induce compliance with the economic interests of the wealthy. Discipline by market forces requires the state's enforcement of property rights of course, but little other direct state intervention is involved. Thus in liberal economies employers rely on markets and especially glutted labor markets to discipline labor.[3] In contrast, by *extra-economic coercion*, I mean directly coercive labor relations such as slavery; coercive restrictions on the mobility of labor such as serfdom, debt peonage, criminal vagrancy laws, and laws that prohibit residency in some areas without a state-issued pass; and coercive practices in the workplace that repress nascent attempts by laborers to organize. Extra-economic coercion thus entails gross violations of fundamental liberal rights of association, speech, free movement, self-ownership, due process, and equality before the law.

The reliance of economic elites on coercion by regime elites in oligarchic societies leads to an enduring alliance between them, with economic elites supporting authoritarian political structures that secure the extra-economic coercion of labor on which their economic position depends. The result may be extreme racially coded inequality, as in South Africa, or moderate inequality, as in El Salvador. However, it is not inequality per se that explains the characteristic politics of oligarchic societies but the way it is generated and sustained. Because the processes determining the distribution of income and wealth are underwritten by the political control of labor, the structure of these societies precludes fully democratic rule: in oligarchic societies these processes are such that the historical dread among elites – that rule by the many would threaten the privileges of the few – cannot easily be allayed by Madisonian reassurances. In oligarchic societies, the link – or more precisely, the presumed link –

[3] Stiglitz and Shapiro 1984.

between political democracy and egalitarian redistribution must be severed if a democracy is to emerge.

Hence if electoral contestation occurs, it is severely restricted in terms of suffrage or political competition, or both, with the result that the oligarchic alliance is not challenged through democratic procedures. Whether civilians or military officers rule and whether or not significant cleavages exist among the elite, the state protects the core interests of the economic elite (a cheap and hard-working labor force and the existing distribution of property) to the advantage of both regime and economic elites. Moreover, while the reliance of economic elites on labor-repressive practices may erode as markets expand, the alliance between economic and regime elites endures, limiting the autonomy of the state. Although regime elites act with autonomy in some areas, reformist factions within the state do not compromise the foundations of the alliance by instituting changes in the electoral regime that would threaten the interests of economic elites.

Of course, the interests of regime elites and economic elites do differ: economic elites prefer to retain the largest possible share of their profits for private consumption or investment, whereas regime elites prefer to tax those profits to capture resources for the state. Regime elites – as in El Salvador and South Africa – often favor interventionist economic policies over the more laissez-faire preferences of some of the economic elite. These and other differences may lead to significant strain within the alliance in times of labor acquiescence, particularly if regime elites and economic elites are largely drawn from ethnically distinct populations, as in South Africa. But in oligarchic societies, as the following chapters demonstrate, elites join forces to defend their common interests against mobilization by subordinant social actors who might threaten the political control of labor or the stability of the polity – and thus the existing distribution of wealth, political power, and social status.

The distinction between extra-economic coercion and market discipline of labor is not always sharp, as Moore and subsequent authors have recognized.[4] Some workplace practices discourage worker organizing efforts yet

[4] Moore 1966: 434. For example, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens weaken Moore's definition of labor repression to include merely labor-intensive agriculture in order to capture the full range of landlord reliance on political control of labor, arguing that agrarian elites in labor-intensive regions oppose democracy because the accompanying freedom of association for workers would force them to pay higher wages (1992: 163–5, 288).

would not strike most observers as directly repressive, and some forms of nonmarket control of labor are not in the interests of the economic elite. For example, state corporatism, as in Brazil, was surely a form of political control of labor, yet the unionization and incorporation of labor occurred under the auspices of a significantly more autonomous state, and the economic elite probably would have done better without corporatist labor relations (workers' wages were probably *higher* as a result of corporatist inclusion, as in Juan Peron's Argentina). Although the distinction between market and political forms of labor discipline is not particularly salient in nonmarket societies, certainly in communist countries political, not market, forces determined working conditions and wages. However, economic elites (plant managers, for example) would probably have done better under market-based labor regulations, as their recent economic success in some of the former communist countries suggests. So neither communist nor corporatist countries count as oligarchic in the relevant sense.

In contrast, both El Salvador and South Africa were oligarchic societies: economic elites long relied on extra-economic coercion of labor for the realization of their income. In El Salvador, labor-repressive agriculture led to a long-standing alliance between economic elites and the military that maintained a highly unequal distribution of land.[5] When the military did not rule directly, electoral contestation was limited to an exceedingly narrow spectrum of political parties dominated by the official military party. Occasional attempts at reform by modernizing factions of the regime elite were swiftly brought to a halt by coups of hardline elements of the military encouraged by the economic elite.

In South Africa, labor-repressive agriculture and mining laid the foundations for a racial oligarchy in which effective suffrage was limited to the white population; all others could not vote to determine the leadership of the polity, and most could not own property, could not live in urban areas without an approved pass, and could not move between areas without the approval of white authorities and employers.[6] Of course not all white South Africans controlled significant means of production; some were workers or civil servants, and some were unemployed. Nonetheless, the relative wealth and social status of whites versus that of nonwhites in South

[5] See Weeks 1986 and Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 226–68.

[6] On the oligarchic nature of South African society and the associated obstacles to democratization, see Adam 1971; Greenberg 1980; Lipton 1985; Price 1991: 6; Friedman 1995 and 1997; and Bratton and van de Walle 1997.

Africa and the provision of generous public services to less fortunate whites depended on the political control of labor and would be undermined by the political enfranchising of the black majority.[7] For its white citizens, the South African regime was significantly more democratic than the Salvadoran regime. Civilians ruled through regular elections, and the state was significantly more autonomous from economic elites as it promoted Afrikaner economic and political interests at the expense of the interests of the mostly "English" economic elite. Nonetheless, Afrikaner ideology and interests converged with English business interests on the maintenance of influx controls on African labor, the illegality of black trade unions, and the political disenfranchisement of Africans. In particular, the dispossession of African farmers and the banishing of black workers fired for shirking or union activism to nonwhite areas by the confiscation of the pass lowered the cost of labor for economic elites.

The Insurgent Path to Democracy in Oligarchic Societies

The transition to democracy generally takes one of four routes. The first pattern, defeat in war followed by the imposition of democracy by occupying forces, as in Germany and Japan in the aftermath of World War II, is not relevant for the set of countries of concern here. Second, a faction of moderate elements may emerge within an authoritarian regime and initiate a period of political liberalization, which may be followed by democratization, a process in some cases impelled by an upsurge of political mobilization after liberalization and sometimes involving a political pact with opposition leaders. This second path was followed in much of Latin America and southern Europe, as well as in Russia. Third, political mobilization by a cross-class alliance of those excluded from power, if successful in forcing regime elites from office, may bring about a democratic regime, as in the Philippines, Nicaragua, Czechoslovakia, and many African countries. Finally, sustained political mobilization from below by working-class actors may force regime elites to negotiate a transition to democracy, as in South Africa and El Salvador, I argue. In the concluding

[7] The analysis of South African politics must draw on the racial terminology of the apartheid state as it shaped the politics of the country as well as the life course of all. I use "African," "Afrikaner," "English," "Indian," and "Coloured" for that reason. "White" refers to "Africaner" and "English" people as a group. I use "black" to mean "nonwhite," a term embraced by opposition movements as a way of rejecting the manipulation of identities by the state.