Transformation of Rebel Movements into Political Parties in Transitions from Civil Conflict: A Study of Rebels' Decision-Making amid Violence in El Salvador and Zimbabwe

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TRANSFORMATION OF REBEL MOVEMENTS INTO POLITICAL PARTIES IN TRANSITIONS FROM CIVIL CONFLICT: A STUDY OF REBELS’ DECISION-MAKING AMID VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR AND ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Efforts to understand modern intrastate conflict require examination of the varied interactions between states and non-state entities battling for control of government. A growing number of civil wars and separatist conflicts, particularly following the end of the Cold War, have been resolved peacefully through negotiated settlements in which rebels abandoned their arms and entered the political arena. While many scholars have studied revolution and democratization in depth, few have focused on explaining the transformation of rebel movements into political parties. Under what conditions do rebel movements engaged in armed conflict with states decide to negotiate, disarm and participate in electoral politics? The analysis relies on historical narrative and process-tracing to uncover complex, interactive causal mechanisms beyond the purely rationalist motives of rebels and régimes.

This qualitative study analyzes two revolutionary groups that transformed from violent combatants into political actors in transitions from civil wars—the ZANU/ZAPU movement in Zimbabwe and the FMLN in El Salvador. Three factors—\( a \) the nature and extent of international influence on the rebels, \( b \) the rebels’ level of popular support and \( c \) the type of electoral system are hypothesized to impact rebels’ decisions. The study examines the shifting mobilization strategies of violent revolutionary groups—and their effects—given particular material and non-material incentives and the interaction of the interests and identities of domestic and international actors in the civil war context. Building on the existing theoretical literature on social revolution, democratization and the participation of “outsiders” in electoral politics, the study of rebels’ decision-making in civil wars is positioned firmly within scholarship on peace-building and political development.
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1 Deconstructing Rebels into Politicians: Research Problem and Methodology

Much of the scholarship on conflict termination over the past several decades has examined the theoretical consequences of different elements of the process: for example, the viability of power-sharing arrangements, the role of peacekeeping in maintaining stability and the durability of civil war settlements. Another subset of the literature has explored revolution, transitions to democracy and attempts to understand these processes through political and economic development models. A crucial intersection of these branches of the literature–post-conflict transitions to peaceful societies and democratic governance–has been less clearly mapped. This developing thread of scholarship has incorporated elements of multiple, overlapping fields, including conflict resolution and management, state-building, diplomacy and post-war reconstruction. Scholars employing this integrated perspective examine the political and institutional dynamics involved in achieving sustainable peace and stability in societies severely damaged by conflict–and the impetus for moving away from violence to politics as a means of struggle. One aspect of this transition is a particular process: the incorporation of armed opposition movements into national political systems–negotiated during peace processes and consolidated through a power-sharing government or electoral contest.

In this analysis I examine the roles of political incentives and the use of violence in relations among states and non-state domestic actors. Under what conditions do rebel
movements engaged in violent conflict with states decide to disarm and participate as political actors? Through a qualitative study based on two case studies, I intend to examine situations in which revolutionary groups opted to transform from active engagement in violent struggle to incorporation as political parties.

First, I hypothesize that the nature and degree of the support of international actors influence the calculations of rebel groups to disarm and enter politics. If rebels anticipate declining international support for their violent means, they will be more likely to alter their strategy and consider political struggle. Second, the level of popular support and political coalitions the rebel group has secured and anticipates has a distinct impact on its decision-making process. Rebel movements with greater, more diffuse popular support and intra-system political alliances anticipate successful transitions to legitimate political parties, in both electoral competitions and power-sharing roles. Third, I hypothesize that the greater the flexibility of a country’s electoral system in creating incentives for rebels’ political participation—as well as in providing assurances of electoral support to the régime—the higher the likelihood that rebels will willingly commit to disarmament and transformation. The type of electoral system, whether closed- or open-list proportional representation, alternative vote or another form, will shape the options and limitations that rebels encounter in acceding to electoral politics—and the demands and concessions they make.

Robert Dahl argued in 1971 that the electoral incorporation of a régime’s opponents would become more likely as the cost of tolerance of the opposition came to be lower than the costs to the régime of continued suppression of armed opposition. In addition to the régime’s strategic considerations, these transitions rely equally on the rebels’ perceptions of incentives and opportunities. How rebel leadership and the rank-and-file view the decision
to enter politics and their electoral prospects—and the sustainability of such a shift in strategy—is critical to understanding the varying significance of institutions, civilian support and regional and international influences on actors in the conflict. Dahl emphasized the purposive steps that government and opposition actors seeking “mutual security guarantees” may take to mitigate the costs of conflict (1971), that is, negotiating the democratic ‘rules of the game’ in an effort to achieve coexistence amid incompatibilities. The systemic opportunities and circumstances under which rebels see it in their interest to compete politically—and the extent to which and manner in which they disarm, as well as the prospects of international support or legitimization rebels may receive as signatories of a ceasefire agreement or peace accord—affect the sustainability or failure of the rebellion-to-politics transition.

The circumstances surrounding a rebel movement’s decision to enter politics—including but not limited to international influence, characteristics of national political institutions and level of popular support for the rebels—have a traceable impact on the strategy’s success. A more nuanced understanding of the reasons that insurgents enter politics will contribute to potential explanations for variations in rebel groups’ political status—whether or not they become functioning parties—and in the stability of peace, following a range of internal conflicts from the end of World War II to the present.

The second half of the twentieth century provides ample internal conflicts in many regions where post-conflict political processes formed part of a “transition to democracy” or a move away from authoritarian rule—in some cases to another undemocratic régime. A scarcity of cases is not the explanation for a gap in the literature on the effect of anti-state actors on institutionalized democracy, or vice versa. The decolonization period which gained
steam after World War II and reached well into the 1960s and 1970s includes independence struggles that spawned victorious movements as well as internal and external secessionist and identity-based tensions that persist today. Rebel-to-politician transitions can be fruitfully examined within a variety of internal conflict types. The ethnic conflicts found, for instance, in the Balkans and some African societies, and historically intractable conflicts, for example, the Palestinian-Israeli standoff, highlight the importance of understanding factors intrinsic to identity-based conflict—religious, ethnic and linguistic commonalities, territorial claims and claims to sovereignty that determine the success or failure of political efforts undertaken by rebel groups. The resolution of separatist conflicts, for example in Iraq, Turkey, India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Spain, highlight questions about the role of power-sharing governments, constitutional engineering and institutional design in analyzing transitions to peaceful politics.

**Review of the Literature: Rebellion to Elections; Social Revolution; Democratization**

Delving into an exploration of the conditions under which rebel groups decide to demobilize and enter politics requires an examination of existing scholarship on the theories that explain the outcomes of revolutionary aspirations that succeed or fail during—or after—internal conflict. The opportunities for theory-building in this underexplored area are many: for example, on the role of international mediators as agents in the processes that bring internal actors to the negotiating table and toward a political settlement of civil war. My objective is to build on past analyses and that of the extant literature on revolution and democratization, placing insurgents in intrastate conflict and elections firmly within the “political development” aspects of peace-building.
By definition, the wide-ranging literature on democracy emphasizes the inherent importance of electoral institutions and free and fair public participation in government. In the post-Cold War era, analysts advocate that this tenet at the heart of representative democracy is the only tested route to just and sustainable government. Scholars seek to understand why this is so, and in what historical circumstances—and how—democratic institutions fulfill the competing aims of both the powerful and the power-seekers. As a fundamental basis for understanding why elections are a legitimate means of incorporating rebel movements into semi-democratic or democratizing governmental structures in post-conflict settings—and why groups might choose this strategy over persisting in waging war—the democracy literature is relevant because it stresses the significance of political processes and institutions, regardless of who holds power or who desires it.

The more recent and specific literature on transformation of revolutionary groups into viable political players (Ryan 1994; Shugart 1992; Söderberg Kovacs 2007; de Zeeuw 2008) stresses several factors that emerge during negotiation processes as determinant of rebels’ successful incorporation into the political system. These include the extent to which disarmament occurs; the terms of ceasefires and agreements; the nature of a state’s particular electoral system and its capacity to provide sufficient guarantees of potential gains in representation for rebels; and institutional reforms that alter the layout of the political field, such as constitutional or electoral system changes. Some analysts, including Shugart and Ryan, purport that the level of pre-election mass mobilization achieved by the rebels affects their prospects for post-transition coalition-building and successful electoral participation.
This assessment coincides with the conclusions of some scholars who have studied social revolution. Goodwin and Skocpol (1994) argue that the structures of states and militaries, in addition to the level of political mobilization of various sectors of society, are critical to explaining revolutions in developing countries. The more exclusionary and less connected the state is to the populace, the higher the likelihood that a revolutionary movement will succeed. “When civil society as a whole can be politically mobilized to oppose an autonomous and narrowly based direct colonial régime or a Sultanistic neo-patrimonial régime,” Goodwin and Skocpol argued, rebel groups have a greater chance to succeed. Their post-war political prospects are similarly shaped by the extent of their consistent mobilization of a wide, mass base. Ryan emphasizes the importance of the political coalitions that rebels develop prior to disarmament and elections, in addition to the degree of widespread mobilization of the electorate that in large part determines the success of the movement as the transition progresses.

Shugart adopts a rational choice perspective of the institutional circumstances that permit guerrillas to become significant actors, citing Giovanni Sartori’s concept of a “relevant party” (Sartori 1976)—one that has coalition or blackmail potential, that is, the ability to participate in executive power or to deny votes to another party that will not join a coalition with it (Shugart 1992, 122). The relevance of Dahl’s argument is clear: the electoral incorporation of a given régime’s opponents is more likely as the costs to the régime of continued suppression or violent opposition surpass the cost of tolerance of the rebels. Democratization becomes particularly significant insofar as it entails mechanisms for reconfiguring the environment within which political competition takes place (Ryan 1994, 30). The degree to which the emerging democratic system is more incorporating than the
system it displaces is critical to the revolutionaries’ ability to secure sufficient social space and build political coalitions (Baloyra 1987). Changes to state institutions may shape the costs to the régime and the rebels of either continuation of the conflict or acceptance of electoral competition. Shugart argues that the nature of the conflict, terms of the ceasefire and institutional reforms influence the costs of embracing electoral competition or continuing the war.

In Rhodesia in 1979, the costs of continuing the eight-year conflict changed for the warring parties—the ZANU/ZAPU liberation movements and the Rhodesian government—allowing the rebels to benefit from their distinct military advantage over the régime and compete in an election with the overwhelming support of a large majority of the population. Due to this imbalance, as Shugart suggests, institutional guarantees were made to the Rhodesian government to lower the cost of its tolerating rebel participation in the system through negotiations of the Lancaster House Constitution. These guarantees ensured an overrepresentation of the white minority in the assembly. ZANU received assurances in the form of an armed Commonwealth election monitoring force; more than 22,000 ZANU/ZAPU rebels mostly complied with disarmament as a condition for the continued support of important allies Britain, Mozambique and South Africa (Shugart 1992, 131-3).

Revolutions and social movements— and the role of the state

The prolific literature on revolution focuses not only on its origins and causes but on explanations of its outcomes. Skocpol argued in *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) that the state should be at the center of analysis of social rebellions, which cannot occur without the breakdown of the administrative and coercive powers of the régime. Skocpol concluded that
autocratic, partially bureaucratized monarchies were transformed through state breakdowns, elite conflicts and popular revolts into more centralized, bureaucratic, “national states” (Skocpol 1994, 5). This process alone does not explain social revolutions, however, and an emphasis on the state (and state-society relations) cannot fully comprehend the success of social movements: a focus on “international and world-historical contexts” (8) is necessary to analyze the conflicts and outcomes that social movements generate. Transnational influences, including economic opportunities and competition among states cannot be neglected in attempts to explain outcomes of social movements.

Another contribution of States and Social Revolutions is its attention to a “structural perspective on sociocultural reality” (Skocpol 1979, 18), an approach that emphasizes the importance of how revolutions emerge and become situated within and shaped by institutional factors—rather than prevailing through the use of collective social wills consolidated by a single group, ideology, class interest, or mass psychology. The roles that revolutionary leaders assume as “marginal elites” amid moments of state breakdown—and their capacity to generate political mobilization during critical, formative periods—determine their significance in constructing new structures in a state-building process. These conclusions were among the precursors of the prevailing literature on rebel-to-party transformations.

Securing geographical and political space is crucial to the development and sustainability of guerrilla movements, particularly those undertaken in poor, rural settings like Latin America in the 1950s through the 1970s, where various revolutionary groups formed and failed to consolidate power—with the exceptions of rebels in Cuba in 1959 and in Nicaragua two decades later. Wickham-Crowley (1992) emphasizes this precondition for the
success of revolutionaries, stressing that active peasant and rural support is essential to the survival of rebel movements. He concludes that foreign aid to guerrillas—whether from Moscow, Havana or elsewhere—or to the régimes being contested is not a determinant factor. Wickham-Crowley focuses on régime type and the régime’s links to society as the combined most powerful factor, citing the irreparably damaging impact of corrupt, personalistic dictatorships that undermine elites, state infrastructure and security forces. In Cuba and Nicaragua, when dictators Batista and Somoza were forced out of office, the governments were left vulnerable to rebel takeover. In contrast, Wickham-Crowley argues, bureaucratic, “collectivist-authoritarian régimes” (Skocpol 1994, 311) in Latin America have been able to combat guerrilla incursions more readily as a result of maintaining some alliances with middle and upper class groups. Competition for the support of the masses is a critical determinant of not only revolutionary success but the perceptions and prospects of rebels faced with a set of strategic moves including entry into political struggle.

Huntington (1968) argued that successful great revolutions do not occur in democratically elected systems, stressing the significance of régime type in effecting transitions. Ryan, however, suggests that a stable democracy is not inherently immune from the dangers of revolutionary penetration; any régime, democratic or not, that enjoys the support of some key sectors of society and the acquiescence of others will pose a challenge to a revolutionary movement (1994, 29). State-centered arguments that stress rebel groups’ societal relations do not break from earlier ideas about the importance of rural populations in fomenting revolutionary struggle.

Recent studies of civil war and political violence by Kalyvas (2003) and Wood (2003) suggest that popular support cannot be categorized as “for or against” the rebels or régime,
but understanding its forms and effects requires fine-grained analytical tools—including an appropriate combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as narrative, historical-based approaches—to uncover the nature, evolution and changeable motivations of civilian support. Collective and selective incentives provided by guerrillas to the populations within which they hide and operate vary according to whether a conflict has ethnic, racial or religious dimensions, entail territorial claims or contestation over natural resources. Weinstein’s analysis (2007) of the internal politics of rebel movements—in Uganda, Mozambique and two factions of the Shining Path in Peru—based on the nature of their strategic interactions with civilian populations is a critical addition to the literature on deconstructing rebels’ varied relationships with constituents. Rebels’ use of violence against civilians as a means of securing or enforcing popular backing or gaining access to resources plays a significant role in determining the type of civilian support the movement receives and how it translates when conflict shifts to the electoral arena.

The use of violence emerges clearly in conflict as one means to achieve legitimacy among a population that a rebel group purports to represent. Johan Galtung’s notion of the “violence of the status quo” (1969, 171-176)—that ingrained, structural inequality amounts to an avoidable injustice and therefore to violence—is evident in exclusionary, anti-reformist state policies. The strategic waging of war against the state by insurgents on the territory of indigenous peoples, ostensibly on behalf of their marginalized interests—for example in Guatemala in the 1960s—illustrates the culture of violence that can envelope all pockets of society in internal conflict. By not legitimizing their own struggle for influence in diverse civilian sectors through political means, the Guatemalan URNG guerrillas’ initial, military-based strategy lacked the force to counter a state apparatus defined by terror. The
subsequent co-option by the rebels of peasants in the northern and western highlands– traditionally marginalized and discriminated against through Galtung’s “structural violence” – resulted in indiscriminate, brutal massacres of indigenous peasants and sustained the cycle of genocidal war that dominated the country for a decade. The URNG’s failure to mobilize indigenous groups to support the guerrilla party in post-conflict elections resulted in its inability to transform into a viable political actor following the 1996 peace accords.

The case of Guatemala is unique in that it demonstrates that rebels’ efforts to co-opt the peasantry during the conflict period may not enhance the group’s future electoral prospects. The rebels’ wartime efforts to exploit the rural population as a base–in addition to the impetus of a national peace dialogue–served to initiate democratizing forces, including the organization and political participation of indigenous, minority, and land rights groups. Amid the complex backdrop of a comprehensive peace agreement, this developing social pluralism served perhaps to alter and broaden the social structures of an evolving political system rather than encourage direct constituencies of indigenous or other minority groups to vote for the guerrilla coalition.

The importance of political coalition-building is clear in the literature on revolutionary success and failure–and the extent of the coalition’s reach across socioeconomic strata plays a significant role. In *State and Revolution in the Third World* (1988), Goodwin argues that when a revolutionary group is able to build a mass base that takes into account the urban, middle classes and upper-class elites–not only the rural peasantry–its chances of eventually taking state power are higher. Using case studies from Central America and Southeast Asia, Goodwin qualifies this argument, adding that historical factors also matter. Whether the state was a directly or indirectly ruled colony determines whether or not
the rebels can exploit popular support for a national liberation movement in the face of a narrow, repressive régime. In his state-centered analysis, régime type plays a large role in helping to determine the breadth of the coalition that the guerrillas are able to muster, but equally significant is the level of inclusion and room for even nominal reforms permitted by the régime.

Democratization and transitions

Incorporating democracy—or more precisely, democratization—into a theoretical discussion of actors waging armed conflict becoming actors engaged in political contests is a natural next step. Elections allow rebel combatants an alternative forum if they perceive or can manipulate incentives to participate. In immediate post-conflict settings, the legitimizing potential of elections and electoral institutions provides fundamental opportunities for elites and “insurgent counter-elites” (Wood 2000) to arrange conditions and propose reforms to the political system, particularly in societies in which minority populations (in the case of Zimbabwe and other African societies, the black majority) have traditionally been marginalized. “If one wants to change the nature of a particular democracy, the electoral system is likely to be the most suitable and effective instrument for doing so” (Lijphart 1995, 412).

The literature on democratization and transitions from authoritarian rule argues that these transformations are influenced by the nature and institutional structures of the old régime. Linz, Stepan and Karl, among others, point to “path dependency” and “contingent choice” as formative elements of régime transition. In transitional phases, characteristics of the previous administration in large part determine the political, social and systemic
structures within which new actors construct goals and strategies. Extending this reasoning to recent post-conflict transitions, Lyons (2005) argues that following a period of state failure or protracted civil war, the transition is characterized both by the distortion or breakdown of peacetime political institutions and social structures and by the alternative structures that arise during conflict, based on the use of violence toward accumulation of and sustaining power.

Scholars who study the political economy of civil war point to these “trajectories of accumulation” (Cramer 2008) that develop during conflict and at least in part determine the political, economic and institutional mechanisms of the transition, for example, whether trade in weapons or drugs will continue to drive the post-war economy. This conclusion suggests that the nature of the interim régime that attempts to implement a peaceful transition is critical to the long-term prospects for stable governance and peace because it determines the norms, precedents and structural frameworks that steer the post-conflict transition (Lyons 2004, 270-272).

Certainly not the first to stress the link between democratization and conflict, Rustow points to “entrenched and serious conflict”—specifically political conflict—as a basis for the genesis of procedural democracy (1970, 361). An analysis of the conditions leading to revolutionary groups’ disarmament and political incorporation will add to the current literature on conflict termination and post-war peace-building, even as additional factors—international humanitarian intervention, United Nations peacekeeping operations, intrastate battles over valuable resources and many others—influence outcomes. This kind of research will require understanding more clearly and with greater nuance the various factors that drive rebels off the battlefield and into the parliament, including: the type of electoral system;
availability of domestic institutional and political reforms during peace negotiations; rebels’
pre-transition political coalitions; and the rebels’ internal decision making approaches.

Preliminary Hypotheses

Studying a range of internal and external factors that incentivize the termination of
conflict and the initiation of peace processes has shaped my hypotheses regarding the
determinants of rebel incorporation as political parties. First, I hypothesize that the nature
and extent of support from international actors significantly influence the calculations of
rebel groups to abandon armed struggle and enter politics. The strategies and strength of
external actors—for example, the United Nations, the United States and regional powers—vary
depending on the global context and their particular interest in a given conflict or state. The
bipolar international system from 1945 to 1989 and the post-Cold War structure shaped the
incentives and assistance that international actors, who at times pursued their own interests
by intervening in intrastate conflicts, providing critical support to revolutionary groups and
régimes. External actors’ varied involvement may encourage rebels to perpetuate violent
wars or terminate them by disarming and settling differences politically. If rebels anticipate
declining international support—in the form of weapons, money or manpower—for their
participation in the conflict, they are more likely to alter their strategy and consider entering
politics. If demobilization is likely to ensure the maintenance of backing by regional or
international actors, rebel groups are more disposed to forgo violence.

Second, the level of popular support that a rebel group garners and the political
c coalitions it builds have a distinct impact on its decision-making process. A rebel
movement’s “analytical imagination” (R. George 2008) – the degree to which it calculates, given incomplete or imperfect information, that it may or may not succeed, based on for example, its assessment of how it has mobilized the masses is sufficient to secure a reasonable number of parliamentary seats or for it to act as a spoiler (or prevail) in a presidential competition, then it may choose to enter the race (Shugart 1992, 122). If a group agrees or is pressured to enter an election by internal or external forces and later anticipates a weak performance at the polls, it may renege on disarmament or other ceasefire commitments, distorting the peace-building process. In addition, different groups have achieved varying kinds of strategic alliances with existing political parties or coalitions in a given domestic political arena. Rebel movements with greater, more diffuse popular support and intra-system political alliances will fare better in their transitions to legitimate political parties, in both electoral competitions and power-sharing roles.

A rebel movement’s calculations about its own popular backing are directly related to the type of electoral system in place— and the potential for domestic political reforms to mitigate the costs to the rebels and the régime of political competition versus continuing the conflict. Institutional engineering of the electoral system may be an instrument of third-party mediators to shape possibilities and progress during mediation efforts. The kind of electoral system, whether closed- or open-list proportional representation, alternative vote, or another form will shape the options and limitations that rebels have in acceding to electoral politics— and the demands and concessions they make. The ability of a political system to accommodate “outsiders”— in this case, a former insurgent group— has been linked in the literature to its level of democracy.
Third, I hypothesize that the greater the flexibility of the electoral system in creating incentives for rebels’ political participation—as well as in providing assurances to the régime—the higher the likelihood that rebels will commit to disarmament and transformation. If a rebel group negotiates an opportunity to secure a meaningful stake in government through electoral competition—often generated through alterations to the electoral system or the apportionment of legislative seats, or a guaranteed role in rewriting a constitution—it is likely to agree to enter the political ring, thereby changing the “rules of the game” and increasing its leverage indefinitely. Political incentives and compromises have long-term effects on stabilizing peace and creating sound institutions in an established political system or one being rebuilt in a post-war period.

I hypothesize that these three factors are central in determining whether rebels become active participants in the political system. The conditions under which rebels make decisions depend on many factors, for example, the status of the military conflict and the demographic, ethnic and religious composition of society. Other elements, including the (ideological, political or economic) purpose of the rebel group may shape the outlook for rebel transformation. Studying a rebel group’s structural organization may demonstrate how a shift to political struggle might affect both internal power equations and potential electoral performance. Finally, political psychology may be useful in analyzing the role of elites—rebel and régime leaders, as well as third-party mediators—and how they perceive that their interests may be served through particular post-war political arrangements.
Research Design

The multiple case study method will enhance my empirical research design in ways that a large-N, quantitative study cannot; a qualitative approach will highlight the particularities of the cases while permitting contingent generalizations. George and Bennett describe the case study approach as the development and testing of a historical explanation of an historical episode that may be generalizable to other events (2005, 5). The “structured, focused comparison” of case study analysis may facilitate the emergence of new hypotheses. The phenomenon of rebels becoming parties has not been widely analyzed; my preliminary approach to studying the patterns and causal relationships involved, then, will most usefully be an in-depth analysis and comparison of two case studies—the FMLN in El Salvador and the ZANU/ZAPU guerrilla coalition in Rhodesia, known as the Patriotic Front (PF) during the latter part of the war and peace negotiations.

Methodology. The outcome of interest in the study is the decision of rebel elites to seek incorporation into the political system through an end to armed struggle. I am aiming to explain rebel leaders’ decisions through examination of three independent variables in order to elucidate the conditions which permit and encourage the decision to explore political struggle. The two cases entail a “most similar” case study design in that both the FMLN and the PF successfully transformed into political parties following resolutions of civil incompatibilities over control of government.

In selecting independent variables I have attempted to take into account the most outstanding causal elements of these transitions in El Salvador and Zimbabwe. The significance of these factors has been outlined in detail in the previous sections on the
background and research to date on the subject. The first variable is the level of the rebels’ pre-transition popular support and political coalitions. This will be assessed through reading historical accounts of the amount and kind of support insurgents have built during internal conflict—how pervasive this popular backing is in different parts of the country—and the nature of alliances they have forged with other existing political parties. News reports, public statements and interviews will also be helpful in assessing popular support.

The second independent variable, the electoral system type, is critical to understanding the institutional and systemic opportunities available to shape incentives and guarantees for the rebels and the régime—and the prospects for electoral incorporation of rebel groups. In addition to a working knowledge of accounts in the literature of particular electoral contests in El Salvador and Zimbabwe, familiarization with different electoral systems and their benefits and disadvantages will be essential to assessing their significance in these transitions.

Third, the level and nature of international support during conflict and peace processes are significant indicators of the political, financial and military support that shapes rebel groups’ decisions to end the war. For each case, the question might be asked: who (what regional and international forces) has a stake in the outcome of the conflict, and through what means and actors have they shaped the capabilities of either the rebels or the government? Particularly given the time periods of the two conflicts (Zimbabwe, 1966-1979; El Salvador, 1980-1989) and their relation to Cold War geopolitical positioning, this requires examining to what extent international donors; the United States and the former Soviet Union; colonial powers; the United Nations and other international mediators; and
bordering states have played a role in influencing political transitions in conflict-ridden societies.

In formulating an approach that seeks to integrate description of the conflicts and post-war transitions with analysis, the structure of the case studies will include first a summary of conflict dynamics and the peace process, taking into account the importance of historical narrative; an examination of the presence and relative importance of each of the three independent variables in significantly greater depth; and a set of analytical conclusions that can be drawn based on comparisons within each case. Within-case analysis and process tracing—a methodological tool that seeks to uncover the micro-foundations of individual decision processes and behavior—will help generate a clearer map of complex dynamics of the transition of rebels to politicians (George and Bennett 2005). These methods emphasize uncovering the precise routes of causal mechanisms within causal relationships to determine how and why particular outcomes occur. Qualitative approaches are particularly useful in this study because they help to examine variation in the three independent variables in each case over time. By identifying causal variables, process tracing aids in theory construction—a primary goal of the study.

Selection of cases. The Zimbabwean liberation movement came to power during the decolonization period through a peace agreement and subsequent “independence election,” and the FMLN negotiated a peace accord with the Salvadoran government as the Soviet Union collapsed. The transitions transpired in two different historical periods and on different continents, and while third-party mediation was present in both cases, Great Britain intervened in Zimbabwe and the United Nations in El Salvador.
The conflicts and transitions in El Salvador and Zimbabwe share several elements that allows for fruitful juxtaposition of the cases. Land was a critical basis for mobilization by the rebels in both conflicts, in addition to the struggle for greater political inclusion and rights. As a result, some strategies of the rebel movements converge; in other ways, their mobilization tactics differ. In Zimbabwe, the rebels’ relationship to the people entailed building local forms of political organization but relied heavily on intimidation and violence to recruit soldiers to the guerrilla forces and ensure popular backing. The FMLN rebels took advantage of the burgeoning social structures of the campesinos who had organized on the basis of land reform, occasionally employing force against civilians.

Data and Sources. In originally exploring the idea for the study, I compiled exhaustive data on the outcomes of intrastate conflicts from 1946 to 2005—whether the rebels became political parties by defeating the government militarily or as a result of a peace accord or power-sharing agreement, were defeated entirely or continued in some form following a conflict. I chose this time period because it provides a wide range of civil wars, struggles for independence and secessionist conflicts in every region of the world. The data consisted of: a list of civil wars during that time period; a list of power-sharing agreements; a list of all revolutionary groups that fought against governments and the outcomes of the struggles. Subsequently I compiled a list of political parties that were formed during transitions from civil war.

Additionally, I gathered supplementary data on the nature of ceasefire agreements and the degrees to which they have been implemented; the level of rebel disarmament prior to, during and following the first post-conflict election; régime types of contested governments; and structural (constitutional or electoral) reforms made as part of rebel-
government negotiation processes. In ruling out the idea of a large-N study of the effect of these factors on successful rebel incorporation as political parties, I decided to focus on why and how the complex political, social and structural dynamics of internal conflict shape incentives for rebels and régimes to make significant shifts in strategies to gain or maintain control of government.

Information from secondary sources, journal articles, books and academic analyses has guided many of my assumptions and hypotheses and comprises much of my historical knowledge. Data on the electoral systems of different states and changes to those systems over time are available from International IDEA. Election result and political party composition data is available from government electoral commissions and databases devoted to electoral study of particular countries and regions. Ideally, I would have the opportunity to gather primary source material through interviews with actors in the conflicts, peace processes and governments under study. Negotiating and financing the requisite level of access to these individuals is prohibitively difficult, but their perspectives are critical to understanding the intricacies of decision-making in the two transitions. Instead I have relied on secondary sources and quantitative and qualitative analyses of war termination and peace negotiations.

Several sources in the peace and conflict literature aided in my conceptualization of the complex phenomenon of rebels’ reconstitution as political actors. The criteria for defining conflict used by Hartzell, Hoddie and Rothchild in their study of peace stabilization following civil war settlements—including the number of battle-related deaths; conflict duration; conflict issue; and international system structure—helped me generally to broaden
and simultaneously sharpen my methodological approach to employing certain variables over others and understanding exactly what I am observing, measuring and attempting to explain.

The Significance of Revolutionaries Reconstituted as Political Parties

This study is an exploration of conflict-ridden states’ internal battles over political legitimacy and the relationships and institutional incentives necessary for movements challenging the government to shift the basis and forum for their struggle from the battlefield to the ballot box. In a set of cases where the rebels’ level of political support; international influence on the actors; and the type of electoral system vary within the conflict period and afterwards—and across cases—use of complex, causal mechanisms helps to calibrate the strength of proposed explanations for rebels’ decisions to exit violent conflict and enter politics. Studies that aim to identify causal mechanisms attempt to answer how and why a factor causes a certain outcome, not only what caused it (Dessler 1991).

My goal is to contribute to mid-level theory on rebel-to-party transformation—and generally, on transitions from violence to politics—not to establish immovable causal relationships. This would be an impossible task given the intricate linkages among factors identified with the impetus and incentives for rebel movements to seek political inclusion, and it is not the purpose of any research or theoretical undertaking. In addition, the limits of inference and theory-building based on analysis of two cases are clear. While variables were conceptualized and hypotheses generated from a rationalist perspective, the causal mechanisms and intervening variables that emerge through the historical narrative and process-tracing may point to more constructivist-oriented findings. Politics—the waging of
“war by other means” in Foucault’s conception (Foucault 2003)—has consequences for understanding the promise and limitations of compromise and choice vested in the negotiating table and the “free and fair” election, in societies where bitter divisions and politics have had a difficult time coexisting.
2 The Patriotic Front: Agents of Conflict, Liberation and Violent Politics in Zimbabwe

The roots of violent politics in Zimbabwe can be traced to the country’s colonial history, racial and ethnic divisions, and its transformative civil conflict. While race and ethnicity continually played a role in shaping politics and participation, international mediation of the conflict that ended with a peace agreement at Lancaster House in London laid the groundwork of the formative transition years following the 1971-1979 war of liberation. Black rebels waged civil conflict to combat unjust land distribution policies under the white minority Rhodesian government and in a struggle for political rights for the black majority.

Since Zimbabwean independence from Great Britain in 1980, Robert Mugabe, then liberation movement leader and president for the last three decades, has attempted to transform Zimbabwe’s social, political and economic realities through wide-ranging reforms, political violence and intimidation of voters. The result has been the de-legitimization of the democratic system in the country, with freedom from colonial-based imperialism forming the background for Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party’s efforts to secure a one-party state and quash dissent. The all-or-nothing nature of politics in Zimbabwe has origins in colonial governance, marginalization of the black majority; and authoritarian regimes that have precluded genuine democratization.

The Patriotic Front (PF) liberation movement in the 1960s sought to break down the white regime and impose majority rule amid decolonization and revolutionary struggles.
throughout southern Africa. In 1979, a “ripe moment” (Zartman 1985) permitted the initiation of British-mediated peace talks and the emergence of a settlement. Under what conditions did the rebels decide to consider political struggle—that is, why did ZANU and ZAPU—the two liberation movements that together formed the PF during the war—agree to come to the negotiating table with their Rhodesian foes and the British, and what benefits did they foresee by exploring an end to armed struggle?

In attempting to explain the PF’s willingness to terminate war through a transition to politics, several causal elements have been proposed: the nature and extent of international influence on the rebels; the flexibility of the electoral system in providing incentives to the rebels and the régime; and the level of rebels’ popular support and pre-transition coalitions. These forces bled into one another in a society polarized by race, inequality, multi-level battles for legitimacy, and a conflict in which an estimated 50,000 people were killed (Knox Chitiyo 2004, 55). The era of decolonization and Britain’s determination to become extricated from governance in Rhodesia lent a particular, imposed urgency to the peace process. The Cold War framed the geopolitical importance of southern Africa and secured the sustained and influential role of the United States in negotiation efforts, as well as limited Soviet support for the rebels.

The explanatory power of each of the three factors in the case of the Zimbabwean guerrillas is evaluated below, allowing for preliminary conclusions. Efforts to build a theory of rebels’ transition to democratic politics depend on analysis of these and other intervening factors in the immediate aftermath of the peace agreement and throughout the subsequent three decades. First, an understanding of the conflict’s historical background and the peace process is necessary. The role of international actors is evaluated, followed by examinations
of popular support for the rebels and of the electoral system’s impact on rebel decision-making. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the rebels’ motives and violent methods in their transition to politics.

Civil Conflict in Rhodesia: A Violent Battle for Liberation and Legitimacy

Rhodesia’s internal conflict, which began with low-intensity guerrilla violence in rural areas in the early- to mid-1960s, stems from an interactive set of deeply embedded causes. Racial divisions festered for many years before they escalated and ignited a conflict over access to political authority and land. Long-standing demands for representation, a role in government for the black majority and equitable access to land formed the crux of the grievances that led to the development of the black nationalist movement. The eight-year liberation struggle has roots in Rhodesia’s colonial era, which began in the late nineteenth century with conquest of the territory by British entrepreneur Cecil Rhodes. Rhodesia was nominally under the control of the British until 1923, when the majority of white settlers—the de facto rulers—voted in a referendum to institute sovereignty (Stedman 1991, 36).

A white minority that never amounted to more than five percent of the population governed and systematically oppressed the black majority in the country. Through property and educational requirements, blacks were disenfranchised—a status that extended to social and economic rights (Stedman 1993, 126). Their lack of access to political power and productivity was most evident in the segregation of the holding of arable land legalized in 1930. After European settlers purchased the most fertile agricultural areas, blacks divided up the remainder, most of which was committed to communal farming in regions called the
Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). In the late 1950s the emergence of Ian Smith’s white supremacist Rhodesian Front movement demonstrated new levels of discrimination and marginalization of blacks in Rhodesian politics, exaggerated by the migration of whites from South Africa and the United Kingdom.

The process of British decolonization in Africa that began in the early 1960s took hold of politics in Rhodesia in 1965, when Smith, then Prime Minister of the white minority government, declared unilateral independence (UDI) from Britain, at a time when the metropole had begun pressuring for majority rule. UDI may have provided the spark for the call to action for black guerrillas, who took up arms against the white government at the time the declaration was announced. When British attempts to negotiate an agreement with the Smith government over formal independence resulted in a proposal that would prevent majority rule for decades, nationalist leader Bishop Abel Muzorewa organized a broad popular consultation on the agreement, resulting in the measure’s defeat. For the first time, ordinary blacks were consulted on the future independence of the country (Stedman 1991, 37).

Until 1963, the liberation movements were united under one banner—Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). When a cadre of ZAPU executive members lost confidence in the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, the group formed their own break-off movement, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). Ndabaningi Sithole was the founder of ZANU, later led by Robert Mugabe. The 1963 split had crucial consequences for the nationalist movement and politics in Zimbabwe. Politics remained divided throughout the liberation struggle and following the peace agreement on basically ZAPU-ZANU lines (M. Sithole 1990, 457).
ZANU and ZAPU guerrillas fighting the war “in the bush” were aided by the geographic pattern of white settlement in Rhodesia—sparsely populated farm areas were susceptible to guerrilla tactics—and by the sanctuary provided by neighboring Mozambique and Zambia. By 1972, the liberation movements intensified the conflict in the countryside through attacks on white farms and destruction of infrastructure and schools (Stedman 1993, 129). Despite a ban on the movement’s existence in 1963, ZANU guerrillas spreading from the northeast of the country after 1972 organizationally established the ZANU half of the Patriotic Front. The grassroots approach of the soldiers of ZANLA—the armed sect of ZANU—had long-term implications for the movement’s future incarnation as a political party. After 1963 operating from a safe haven in Mozambique, Rhodesia’s eastern neighbor, ZANU carried out mobilization efforts in large areas of the Rhodesian countryside to demonstrate that it articulated the grievances of the black majority.

**Figure 1.** The Ethnic Composition of Zimbabwe’s Population.

Ethnicity plays an important role in explaining the ZANU-ZAPU divisions that were ignited during the liberation war and later molded national and local-level politics. The black
population in Zimbabwe belongs to about forty different ethnic groups (Sithole 1990, 455). At the time of British occupation in 1890, a long-standing dispute over land ownership prevailed between the Ndebele minority ethnic group–comprising about 19 percent of the black population–and the Shona majority, which account for about 77 percent of blacks. Each of these groups can be further divided into several sub-ethnic groups (see Figure 1). The overarching ethnic rift remained but was overshadowed during the “period of colonial consolidation and black acquiescence to white rule” (Sithole 1990). Liberation movement leaders were conscious of the Ndebele-Shona divide since the formation of the nationwide struggle for majority rule in the 1950s (1990, 460). By the 1970s ZAPU had become a Ndebele party and ZANU a Shona party, and both sects employed violence in attempts to eradicate the other.

The unfolding of multiple-level conflict dynamics

While ZANLA operated from Mozambique and in the eastern and southeastern regions of Zimbabwe, mobilizing the masses and waging guerrilla war on white settlers, ZIPRA guerrillas did not adopt the same two-pronged strategy. Its efforts focused significantly less on politicization and more on building relations with communities for immediate purposes: food, medical care and recruitment. ZIPRA also generally did not employ tactics of guerrilla warfare. The instructions of the guerrilla army’s high command for ZIPRA soldiers focused primarily on attacking white settlements and checking the westward advance of ZANLA forces (Cliffe et al 1980, 56). In addition to the ZAPU-ZANU split in 1963, the differing approaches to the conduct of the war by the two movements–and the mission of each to destroy the other–had clear implications for the rebels’ calculations about continuing the conflict or seeking a negotiated settlement. Given the Rhodesian
government’s militarily inferior position as the 1970s progressed and the war continued to rage, Mugabe and Nkomo, the leaders of ZANU and ZAPU respectively, each cultivated his own ideas about who would hold the reins of power when the black majority took power—whether through military victory or a negotiated solution.

By 1972, ZANLA’s strategy toward intensified, hit-and-run terrorist attacks and the Rhodesian government’s lack of preparation to combat the security threat posed to white settlers severely damaged the country. Stedman argues that two factors contributed to change the military situation in favor of the guerrillas: first, the collapse of the Portuguese colonial authorities in Mozambique in 1974-75, which opened a 600 mile-long safe haven for Zimbabwean guerrillas; and second, the counterterrorism approach of the Rhodesian security forces, which led tens of thousands of rural Zimbabweans into Mozambique as refugees, providing the liberation movement with thousands of young guerrilla recruits. (See Figure 2). Guerrilla offensives ravaged the Rhodesian economy, highly dependent on agriculture and reeling from international sanctions imposed in 1965 and 1968. In addition, the Rhodesian Armed Forces were able to draw only approximately 60,000-70,000 white men who were eligible for recruitment to the military (Stedman 1993, 130). The combination of these factors—and an internal fissure in the Smith government over the nature of the guerrilla threat—generated a distinctive military advantage for the guerrillas from the end of 1972 to 1976.
Resistance, Ripeness and Rebel Calculations

The developing contours of the military struggle gradually engendered revisions of the rebels’ and régime’s notions of their resolve to continue the fighting. Mugabe and Nkomo had been released from exile in 1974, and in 1976 the two groups had formed the Patriotic Front to present a unified face of the liberation movement in the context of negotiations. Two years later, Smith entered into an “internal settlement” with three moderate, non-militant nationalist leaders: Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Ndabaningi Sithole and Chief Jeremiah Chirau, forming a new government. Smith conceded majority rule to blacks but retained veto power and a disproportionate number of national legislative seats for
whites. In brokering this agreement, Smith was attempting to negotiate with the “moderate fringe of the rebellion” (Zartman 1995, 23) and evade the settlement of fundamental incompatibilities with Mugabe and Nkomo. Instead, the war intensified; and the government held an election in April 1979—in which Muzorewa won a landslide victory for Prime Minister.

Every internal conflict reaches a critical moment in which the opportunity to negotiate must be seized (Zartman 1985; 1995). “Ripe moments,” as defined by Zartman, “are composed of a structural element, a party element, and a potential alternative outcome—that is, a mutually hurting stalemate, the presence of valid spokespersons, and a formula for a way out” (Zartman 1995, 18). The characteristic asymmetry of civil war makes stalemate—not only on the battlefield but in terms of legitimacy and resources—difficult to attain. In 1979, given the rebels’ distinct military advantage, the belligerents began to view negotiations as a means to achieving their maximum political gains—ideas which were gradually shifting as the war progressed. “In a situation of continuing uncertainties, parties negotiate when they change their estimates of future potentialities” (Zartman 1995, 18). The internal settlement generated political conditions that weakened Smith’s position amid a losing war, ultimately making a move toward negotiations more plausible for the rebel leaders, who were positioned to gain strategic political and military advantage.

*Prelude to Lancaster House—Attempts at International Mediation 1974-1979*

The move toward the negotiation table and ultimately a transition to political struggle unfolded over a series of three internationally-led attempts between 1974 and 1979 to mediate a settlement in Rhodesia before the Lancaster House conference. The attempt in
1974-75 of South African President John Vorster and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda to push through a plan to mediate peace talks between Smith and a unified coalition of all black nationalist leaders failed. The Kaunda-Vorster plan envisioned the Presidents of the Front Line states—the black countries bordering Rhodesia supporting the nationalists—pressuring the black leaders into unification; South Africa would coerce the Smith government into accepting black majority rule.

Having won a commitment to majority rule from Smith in 1976, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger attempted to broker peace at a conference in Geneva. After three months of no progress, Kissinger lacked the key support of the Front Line Presidents and black nationalist leaders—who had not agreed to the conditions that Kissinger had promised Smith. His effort relied on “the crude invention of a ripe moment” (Stedman 1991, 118). Each side of the conflict still believed military victory was possible, and it became clear that Smith was not genuinely willing to relinquish white control of government. Moreover, the nationalist leadership was not sufficiently consolidated by 1976 to order a complete stop to the fighting, and the leaders themselves—including Sithole and Muzorewa—were divided.

Finally, the Anglo-American efforts to engender a settlement to the conflict in 1977 and 1978, led by David Owen and Cyrus Vance, were unsuccessful for two reasons: the insistence that the nationalist guerrillas comprise the national military during the transition period, to which the white government would not agree; and the concurrent, separate negotiation of Smith’s internal settlement (Stedman 1993, 133-4).

A mutually hurting stalemate did not evolve clearly in the conflict in Rhodesia. Smith refused at all costs to consider a settlement to the war and yield to PF rule. ZANU and
ZAPU were internally divided: Mugabe’s strategy was to defeat the régime militarily, an outcome he saw as imminent; Nkomo believed that the PF would win the war but at a prohibitive cost. Both were aware of war weariness on the part of their regional supporters and their patrons’ preferences for a negotiated settlement given the heavy costs they were bearing (Stedman 1991, 137).

Amid forceful external efforts, a ripe moment for international mediation emerged. The belligerents had reached deadlock: they could not escalate the conflict with the available means and at an acceptable cost. Asymmetry on the battlefield favored the rebels, and the British as self-appointed mediators took advantage of an opening permitted by Rhodesian domestic politics. The April 1979 election of Muzorewa as Prime Minister facilitated the participation in negotiations of a decision-maker other than Smith, changing the power calculus of the parties to the talks–particularly of the British, who saw Muzorewa as weak. The Rhodesian government entered into negotiations at Lancaster House because they were lured by the British offer of possible recognition of the government and as a result, the lifting of international sanctions. Muzorewa also believed that he could win a post-settlement election against Mugabe (Stedman 1991, 237).

The PF was willing to moderate when the Mozambican and Zambian governments pressed Mugabe and Nkomo through threatened withdraw of military support and resources that were imperative to the continuation of the conflict. Mozambican President and former revolutionary leader Samora Machel believed that Mugabe would win any election (Stedman 1991, 237). The rebels’ decision to come to the table at Lancaster House depended heavily on Mugabe’s and Nkomo’s calculations of their post-settlement political prospects. Smith’s rigid adherence to continued military struggle amid likely defeat shaped Mugabe’s tactical
strategy throughout the latter 1970s regarding the choice of armed conflict or future electoral struggle.

Mugabe was convinced that he could win outright and he feared risking the gains he had already won. Mugabe was convinced that he would win an election, but was unsure he would have a chance to win an election. He believed in armed struggle, because of Smith. (British diplomat 1987, quoted in Stedman 1993, 138)

Despite a belief that the rebels were headed for military victory and the risk of negotiations, Mugabe led the PF into the next round of negotiations because the PF would lose the support of its regional patrons if it continued fighting. Mugabe foresaw that an end to the war would allow the rebels to assume political power through means deemed free and fair by international standards. Like the course of the conflict itself, the Rhodesian people and the anticipated trajectory of negotiations favored the rebels. Stedman’s concept of “refined ripeness” emphasizes that not all parties must perceive a mutually hurting stalemate for a ripe moment for mediation to emerge. With concrete pressure from Machel in particular on Mugabe—who did not see a peace process as necessary—to end the fighting, and the individual convictions of Mugabe, Nkomo and Muzorewa that each would win at the ballot box permitted a “paradoxical situation in which both sides believe that a settlement will produce a victory for them” (Stedman 1991, 237).

Lancaster House, 1979–An Internationally-steered Peace Process and Settlement

How did the incentives and opportunities of the Lancaster House agreement develop during the negotiations in a way that the rebels and the régime were willing to agree on its provisions? The British approach to the arbitration of peace talks was openly heavy-handed.
British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington made it clear that British proposals— not suggestions or statements from other parties—would form the working basis for discussion and compromise throughout the talks (Stedman 1993, 141). In the end, the British steering of the process permitted the emergence of a settlement that would shape the rules of the game in Zimbabwean politics for decades.

To the rebels, the outcome of the negotiation over the critical transitional period would determine its success in the post-settlement election. Before Lancaster House talks began, the PF’s maximum position of taking power without negotiations or previous elections meant it was willing to discuss the specifics of a new constitution and schedule elections after assuming power: from their perspective, “rules and organic structures could always be changed afterwards” (Low 1985, 102). The PF recognized, however, that it was not sufficiently confident of winning power militarily that it could adopt too inflexible a position going into negotiations. The significant geographical presence of ZANU and ZAPU and their leaders’ fear of losing the local control and political ground they had won on the battlefield, as well as the leverage of the gun, impacted their preferences during the talks. The PF insisted unsuccessfuilly on negotiating the elements of the transition first.

As the British mediator with “dictatorial power” (Stedman 1993, 141), Carrington insisted that the constitution be the initial and fundamental focus of the negotiations before considerations of security and the transition period in order to ensure that the talks first addressed the incompatibility at the crux of the conflict—the structure of government. In Carrington’s words, “…the only way to end the war is to remove the reasons for it” (Stedman 1993, 141).
Conversely, constitutional guarantees and the structure of the independent government were more important to Smith and the Rhodesian government. Their objective was to secure for the white population solid constitutional protections, which eventually emerged in the form of a pre-determined number of parliamentary seats reserved for whites. The final arrangement required the Smith government to yield more than “the trappings of power” (Low 1985, 105). At Lancaster House Smith was forced to negotiate with his enemies and make enormous concessions.

_The outcome of Lancaster House negotiations_

As the two fundamental sources of conflict, majority rule and land distribution had to be addressed in any peace process. 102 days of negotiations resulted in a final agreement on a new constitution, transitional arrangements and a ceasefire. Among the most important provisions of the final, agreed-upon constitution were: majority rule; parliamentary democracy based on party-list proportional representation; twenty seats reserved for whites in the 100-seat lower house of the legislature; a comprehensive Bill of Rights with guarantees for individual freedoms; and compensation provided to white settlers for land redistribution. The constitution also provided for a seven-year guarantee of the overrepresentation of whites in parliament and a ten-year assurance of multi-party governance (Sithole 1997, 128). Disputes over the question of land reform threatened the conference and required the PF to submit to the stipulation that it reimburse settlers for the “recovery of the land of which the people were dispossessed” (Baumhögger 1984, quoted in Preston 2004, 23; italics in original).
The transitional arrangements provided for a British governor who would administer an interim government through existing Rhodesian government infrastructure during a twelve-week transition period in which multi-party elections would be organized. Commonwealth observers would monitor the elections. Muzorewa agreed to resign and allow the British to govern during the transition. The PF ultimately gained for their militaries symbolic recognition equal to that of the Rhodesian security forces (Stedman 1993, 153), but did not secure the formation of an integrated transitional security force. The ceasefire, settled a month after the transitional period was finalized, would largely be self-enforced by the armies themselves, without a peacekeeping force. Rhodesian troops would deploy to their barracks, and the PF guerrillas inside Rhodesia would report to assembly points where they would be fed and monitored by a 1,200-member Commonwealth Monitoring Force.

International Influence on the Rebels and Implications for Their Entry into Politics

International actors, particularly Great Britain, significantly molded the process and outcome of negotiations at Lancaster House. The settlement that resulted was a clear demonstration of both the British colonial hold and its ardent desperation to extricate itself from continued authority in Rhodesia. In the end, the internal parties demonstrated a willingness to accept conditions and compromises that were externally imposed because doing so permitted two important results—legitimization of the peace process and its outcome; and an end to the war. The settlement importantly redefined politics and power in what became Zimbabwe following the initial election. Compromise on the terms of access to violence and politics characterized the outcome of Lancaster House—results engineered by the British mediators.
International and regional players’ influence on the rebel leaders

The most significant international imprint on the peace process in Zimbabwe and on the rebels’ approval of the agreement that paved the way for their entry into politics was unquestionably British mediation. Carrington’s ability to shape the motivations of various actors through thorough preparation, careful sequencing and the creation of “consistent networks of linked agreements” (Lax and Sebenius 1986, quoted in Stedman 1991, 23) permitted the mediation effort to succeed. Britain’s achievement at Lancaster House removed the “diplomatic thorn” (Preston 2004, 153) of Rhodesia that had jeopardized relations with its former colonies and undermined its position in the United Nations and the Commonwealth.

The regional governments that funded and sheltered the guerrilla movements greatly impacted the decisions of ZANU and ZAPU to end the conflict and enter political struggle. The Front Line states, particularly Zambia and Mozambique, lent direct support to the nationalist movements. Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda was consistently supportive of negotiation efforts and maintained a less militarist stance toward the Rhodesian conflict than Machel—who had fought a nationalist guerrilla war in his own country and believed socialist principles were central to the liberation of southern Africa as a whole. As a result, his government’s support for ZANLA and Mugabe took a different form than Zambia’s support for ZIPRA. Machel’s FRELIMO supplied bases for ZANU in Mozambique; at least five hundred troops for combat alongside ZANLA; and the closure of its Rhodesian border. Kaunda also sealed Zambia’s border until it became economically untenable (Preston 2004, 161). In 1979, the toll on both the Zambian and Mozambican economies had reached
destructive levels. It was in the interests of the Front Line states to end the violence and repair the destruction in their countries.

Without the Front Line states’ active assistance, the guerrillas could not continue the war. The fervent pressure of the Front Line Presidents was clear to Mugabe:

The front-line states said we had to negotiate we had to agree to go to this conference. There we were, we thought we were on top of the situation back home, we were moving forward all the time, and why should we be denied the ultimate joy of having militarily overthrown the regime…?... But this other way, no. We had to meet with Muzorewa and Smith as equals (Charlton 1990, 69-70; italics in original).

Throughout various mediation efforts, the role of the Front Line Presidents—including also Julius Nyerere of Tanzania—was to provide the necessary pressure to compel the PF leaders to agree to British demands. Dexterous engineering by the British arbitrators resulted in a negotiation process and outcome that relied on the Front Line Presidents as reliable agents of leverage and trusted allies of the rebel leaders with a vested interest in their success.

The United States exerted notable influence on the rebels and the régime at various moments throughout the conflict and peace process. The role of the United States as a mediator in partnership with the British was critical to applying pressure on combatants in early efforts. Through Kissinger’s ultimately failed intervention and the 1975-76 Anglo-American initiative, U.S. negotiators conveyed a message that the resolution of the Rhodesia conflict was of interest to the international community outside of the decolonization impetus of the British. Checking the expansion of the Soviet Union in southern Africa was Kissinger’s primary objective when he became personally involved in negotiation efforts. Through his interactions with Kissinger, Smith learned to use U.S. influence with the Front
Line states and nationalist leaders to obtain an acceptable settlement (Low 1985, 105). Smith continually turned to and relied on the support of outside actors to achieve agreement from the nationalist groups.

Early in the Lancaster House talks, the United States expressed ambiguous willingness to support a fund to help an independent Zimbabwe finance compensation to white settlers whose land would be redistributed under a new government (Stedman 1993, 146). This provided the face-saving guarantee that the PF needed to be able to accept the constitutional provisions, primarily the reimbursement obligation—a major concession on the rebels’ part since land was the conflict issue around which many nationalist supporters and would-be voters had mobilized.

The Soviet Union was less involved in supporting revolutionaries in Rhodesia than in other civil conflicts during the Cold War. The USSR provided training and arms to guerrilla forces in southern Africa but considered Rhodesia and Namibia to be part of the U.S. sphere of influence (Preston 2004, 158). The Soviets primarily supported ZAPU and ZIPRA to the exclusion of ZANU, who sought assistance from China, as well as Yugoslavia and Romania. The Chinese made small arms transfers to ZANLA and provided economic and diplomatic aid to bolster the African nationalist cause. China’s reconsideration of its revolutionary assistance policies beginning in 1975 led to an eventual withdraw of weapons supplies and other aid to ZANU. Preston argues that this change had little impact on Mugabe’s calculations about the end of the conflict or peace talks. Finally, the Cuban régime provided direct military assistance to the PF and Front Line states; when in June 1979 a Cuban proposal called for the surrender of the guerrillas’ political independence in a rebel-
controlled area of Rhodesia, Mugabe and Nkomo rejected it (159). In sum, the world’s communist powers had little influence on the rebels’ movement toward politics.

Another regional player, South Africa, supported the Rhodesian government against the nationalist guerrillas. South African investment in the war was estimated at $300 million by 1975, in the form of arms, funds, weapons and fuel (Preston 2004, 165). The Smith government’s relations were often tense with South Africa, whose interests were regional stability, the prevention of a radical Marxist regime from taking power in Rhodesia and maintaining apartheid at home. The South Africans, who continually exerted pressure on Smith to forge a settlement, had their own reasons for wanting an end to the war in Rhodesia (Low 1985, 104). Dzimba describes South African policy in the region beginning in 1977 as “destabilization,” aimed at countering what they perceived as “the Moscow-led communist conspiracy through regional governments, initially Angola and Mozambique and later Zimbabwe” (Dzimba 1998, 1). The collapse of Portuguese rule in particular shaped South Africa’s concerted strategy to ensure that Rhodesia did not fall to the rebels but became responsive to South Africa’s demands and interests in the region (41).

British Mediation and Rebel Accession to Politics

The role of the British as “arbitrator” (Stedman 1991) ensured that a settlement emerged from Lancaster House. Lord Carrington’s function in the negotiation process might be compared to Zartman’s social decision-making mode of “judication” (Zartman 1977, 621-22). Carrington can be conceived as an individual actor in a collective process in which the “social units” are the warring parties. As the primary arbitrator, Carrington himself had assumed a degree of adjudicatory authority which ensured that his proposals set the tone and
exclusively provided the substance of the negotiations. He controlled and defined the parties’ communications with one another through ongoing bilateral meetings. The British approach influenced the belligerents, engendering a perfunctory negotiating environment. As a result of this mediation style, a limited range of genuine engagement between the white government and black guerrilla leaders or even between the PF and the black political leaders emerged at the negotiating table.

The British had determined before the conference began that they would secure a final settlement to which all the parties would agree. The process of the peace talks demonstrated that external actors were more interested in securing a settlement than the substance of the agreement. The belligerents realized they were aided by the mission of the British to extricate themselves from governance in Rhodesia and took advantage of these circumstances. In a national environment in which zero-sum politics defined interaction, this focus on an outcome may have aided the persistence of characteristic all-or-nothing politics of Zimbabwe in the post-conflict period.

The Lancaster House experience suggests that involvement of regional actors who can represent and co-opt the rebels is essential to getting them to the table and to accept certain provisions. The British relied on forging good relations with the Front Line Presidents in the interest of leveraging their influence with Mugabe and Nkomo. Third-party mediators must find ways to develop working relationships with all parties in a peace process because the approval, influence and leverage that secondary players provide may be crucial to coercing the rebels or the régime into accepting a final settlement.
Mugabe recognized that exploiting the opportunities presented by the British at Lancaster House would provide international legitimization of the peace process and allow him to compete in an election in which he was confident of victory. Accepting an agreement—even if less than ideal in terms of the goals of the liberation movement—black majority rule and land reclamation—would allow him to seize a powerful mandate to govern an independent Zimbabwe. Once Mugabe accepted that military victory would not be possible, he took advantage of the British urgency to secure an agreement. The international community provided “a way out” of conflict for the liberation movements, making their accession to democratic politics possible in a racially-charged environment that had never before permitted the political coexistence and competition of black and white rivals on equal ground.

Former U.S. assistant secretary of state Chester Crocker argues that the external dimension of civil war must be resolved and removed before the combatants can resolve the core internal conflict (Zartman 1995, 5). In the case of Zimbabwe, one might argue that the heavy-handed participation of the colonial power in a four-year peace process was essential to a settlement. The impetus for decolonization and a resolution of the “Rhodesia problem” fueled the urgency of the Lancaster House peace effort. Still, the external dimension could not be sufficiently uprooted to the extent that the conflict was whittled down to the incompatibility among internal parties. The fundamental rift was driven by the legacy of colonialism, which had permitted racial and political inequalities in Rhodesia to persist. The perfunctory settlement brought an end to the civil conflict and instituted a political system for which an electorate divided and demoralized by war was not prepared.
Liberation turned Democracy–Popular Support for the Rebels

The Zimbabwean guerrilla coalition operated with a clear mandate during the conflict, and after its negotiated settlement, the politicized mission of African liberation translated into electoral support. Led by ZANU and ZAPU, blacks–those who remained within Rhodesia’s borders and the refugees in Mozambique and Zambia–perceived themselves as being liberated and as claiming political control of their nation for the first time. In this sense, the guerrillas were able to exploit a common, collective identity with blacks who had been oppressed by whites for decades. In addition to race, ethnicity was a critical factor in determining which sect of the nationalist movement blacks supported in particular areas controlled by ZANLA and ZIPRA.

The mobilization strategies undertaken by ZANU and ZAPU during the war helped determine the electoral backing that each political party received in the initial post-conflict election. Multiple, interactive modes of popular support formed the basis of the nationalists’ reliance on the electorate. By the time of the February 1980 vote, Mugabe had split the coalition, having decided that ZANU would run alone. While ZANU focused its efforts on community mobilization, during the war ZAPU did not politicize the population with a view to the long-term advantages this might provide the movement (Cliffe et al 1980 55). This difference had implications for electoral performance, but perhaps more important was the rebels’ use of intimidation and violence in coercing black voters to support the guerrillas (Kriger 2005)
The guerrillas received popular support by promising particular collective goods to the communities in which they lived and from which they based their military operations. The nationalist movements made promises to the poor blacks in the Tribal Trust Lands–scattered, discrete pockets of poor-quality land reserved for Africans. These incentives included land ownership; loans to farmers; a minimum wage for agricultural laborers on settler farms; and an examination of the salary structures of mine and industrial workers (Cliffe et al 1980, 48). The supporters cultivated by the guerrillas through promises of land reclamation comprised the nationalists’ definitive primary constituency. Backing on the basis of land was critical to their sustained popularity, founding purpose and the electoral support on which Mugabe and Nkomo depended at Lancaster House and in the transition period following the end of the war.

The two nationalist rebel groups–operating in differing territories, employing different military tactics and often engaged in combat with one another–cultivated the support of their primary constituency–landless, rural blacks, in divergent ways. In rural areas of northeastern and eastern Rhodesia and in the bordering provinces of Mozambique from where they launched attacks and maintained bases, ZANU and its ZANLA guerrillas treated the liberation war as a political campaign. Lionel Cliffe and his co-authors argue that the guerrilla presence spreading from the northeast of the country after 1972 established the party and guaranteed its electoral victory. The ZANLA guerrillas set up levels of organization among the communities in which they hid; they built organizational structures in fragmented areas dispersed among white settler farms–“a patchwork of semi-liberated pockets in a majority of the TTLs” (Cliffe et al 1980, 49).
ZANLA guerrillas helped develop a hierarchical system, forming committees at the provincial to village levels, and in areas where the Rhodesian state apparatus was ineffective, the committee structure constituted a parallel governing structure and provided basic social services. The teenage mujibas allied to ZANLA in the communities served as community watchdogs, gatekeepers and liaisons between the people and the guerrillas. The mujiba networks, people’s committees and the guerrillas formed the complex structural network on which ZANU could rely in the countryside (Cliffe et al 1980, 54).

Based in the west and northwest of Rhodesia and in Zambia, ZAPU operatives relied on the pre-war popular mobilization it carried out in the early 1960s when it operated legally, and on the underground structures that developed following the ban on the party. ZAPU did not emphasize wartime political mobilization; its leaders focused on military attacks, establishing public relations mainly for obtaining minimal basic supplies and needs for guerrilla soldiers. The failure to make popular politicization a definitive goal contributed to a crisis of purpose within ZAPU in 1970, which affected its leadership cohesion and resulted in an even greater emphasis on military over political operations (Cliffe et al 1980, 55-56). By that time ZIPRA forces were deployed mainly to hold their ground in the western regions of Rhodesia and check the advance of ZANLA forces. Their local-level backing relied not on political mobilization but the popular confidence they gained as a result of military victories.

Guerrilla combatants were a fundamentally important constituency of the nationalist movement as a whole. The guerrillas’ relationships with their respective parties and their leadership were based simultaneously on cooperation and conflict (Kriger 2003, 24-29). In securing territory and the “liberation” of delimited areas of the Rhodesian state, the guerrillas at varying times employed coercion and violence against innocent civilians. Their lack of
discipline is attributed by various analysts to the guerrillas’ resentment of neglect by their leadership; a lack of ideological training and overall guiding purpose; and guerrillas’ frustration over not being able to secure a particular liberated zone or reliable popular support (27).

Guerrillas’ use of violence to influence levels of popular backing foreshadowed the violent voter coercion that took place in February 1980 at polling stations and in communities by ZANLA guerrillas who had been instructed by Mugabe and ZANU leaders not to report to assigned assembly places but to remain in their operational areas, in violation of the ceasefire (Kriger 2005, 4). The report of the British Observer Group (BOG) on the election proceedings documented “brutal ‘disciplining murders’ as examples” and “generalized threats of retribution or a continuance or resumption of the war” if ZANU (PF) did not win the election (BOG 1980, 13). Mugabe’s decision to violate the ceasefire and intimidate essentially first-time voters betrays, at best, a fundamental misunderstanding of democratic politics, or worse, a purposeful circumvention of its basic elements following a war for majority political power.

Rebel leaders’ predictions of their own parties’ success also depend on the electoral and other types of support they expect to receive from guerrillas in the post-conflict context. The number of militants a rebel movement claims, then, is expected to be an important factor in determining its success as a political party (Allison 2006, 152-3). In addition to the degree to which guerrillas mobilize the population, the number of guerrillas—as committed and mobilized political actors—will influence the decision of rebels to disarm and enter politics. Reliable data on the numbers of guerrillas are difficult to find, but one estimate puts the total number of combined guerrilla forces in 1980 at 65,000 (Kriger 2003, 24).
The Zimbabwean guerrillas—particularly ZANLA fighters who received privileged status as a result of ZANU having won the election and thus control of institutions—became elites in the post-war political landscape. Kriger argues that war veterans and the ZANU régime used and abused one another for power, and these interactions shaped the political environment, popular perceptions and electoral outcomes (2003). After the war, guerrilla ex-combatants continued to carry out and enforce ZANU’s mission.

The guerrillas’ use of violence during and after the war exploited the profound cleavages in Zimbabwean society that were deepened by the conflict. As the war intensified during the 1970s, political divisions between ZANU and ZAPU catalyzed and revealed ethnic fissures in the black population, eventually resulting in the conflict in the Matabeleland provinces that began in the early 1980s. Tribal divisions are rooted deeply in history, and the conflict made ethnic differences starker and more divisive, linking them directly with politics and violence. ZANU, led by Mugabe (a Shona) came to be identified with the Shona-speaking peoples and ZAPU’s Nkomo (a Ndebele) implicated the party’s association with the Ndebele tribe. The 1980 election results illustrated clear support for ZANU in the eastern provinces and ZAPU’s base of popular backing in the two Matabeleland provinces; in the immediate aftermath of a nationalist war for black liberation, votes were cast along basically ethnic lines.

Emphasis on racial and ethnic dimensions results in an oversimplification of the conflict in Rhodesia and the fact that it was a violent struggle between African nationalists as well as of rebels against a régime. Cliffe et al argue that the tendency to identify one party with a particular tribe or language group occurred throughout the factional infighting that occurred among leaders of the nationalist movement, its splits, periods in exile and through
the actual geographic pattern of the combat. The territorial dimension of Zimbabwean electoral trends coincides with ethnic and racial splits, evidenced by ZANU’s refusal to allow other parties to enter ZANLA-controlled areas during the 1980 election campaign.

As “political entrepreneurs,” rebel leaders and régimes draw on and exploit ethnicity for political gain, altering the outlook for conflict resolution and democratic modes of struggle. Civil conflict heightens people’s sense of fear and instability; as a result, they rely more on preexisting ties like ethnicity and religion (Tarrow 1998, 145). As the case of the PF illustrates, rebel organizations make appeals to this hyper-articulated group identity and even construct new identities through violent struggle (Lyons 2005, 43). When Stedman asked Nkomo about the conflict between the Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, he responded, “There is no conflict between the peoples of Zimbabwe. It is something that we leaders create” (Stedman 1991, 31-32, cf. 2). A quote from a ZIPRA guerrilla in December 1980 conveys a similar notion: “Hatred is being brought about by our own leaders; it is going to bring hatred between the people of Zimbabwe. People are being kept apart by the leaders” (Cliffe et al 1980, 66).

The brutal massacres later carried out by ZANU(PF)’s North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade security force in the Matabaleland provinces of Zimbabwe from 1982-1987 demonstrated that not only would violence be employed on large-scale levels to guarantee political outcomes, but that ethnicity would be exploited as a mobilizing element of national politics.

Differences between the guerrilla sects and their supporters can be explained by the politicization of ethnicity, the growing rift between the leaders of ZANU and ZAPU, and
their divergent strategies during the conflict. As became increasingly clear as the war progressed, particularly in the late 1970s, the electoral struggle in the post-war era would include competition between the two movements. Mugabe’s ambitions of authoritative political power molded his views of his role in an independent Zimbabwe and thus his decision to enter talks as part of a unified nationalist alliance with a clear military advantage over government forces. Even as late as 1978, Mugabe had not fully consolidated his leadership of ZANU and was cautious about taking steps that would disturb intra-rebel politics. Mugabe viewed the alliance with ZAPU as key to maintaining a unified front for the purposes of peace talks and for regional and international legitimacy, but he had no plans to share government. The conflict itself—popular mobilization by the guerrillas and military advances against the régime—shaped Mugabe’s increasingly ambitious goals.

*Carrots and Sticks in a Battle for Legitimacy*

The amount and nature of political support the movement anticipates it will engender as a legal political party in a post-conflict electoral contest will largely determine its willingness to negotiate war termination and abandon violence as a means for pursuing its ends. Weinstein argues that identity-based groups are more likely to be successfully incorporated into the design of political institutions than rebel groups that are dependent on material incentives or on the provision of tangible goods to its supporters or soldiers (2002, 4). The liberation movements in Zimbabwe benefited from exploiting the ethnic and racial ties of the black majority and promises of the right to representation in a white, colonially-dominated society, as well as from their pledges of post-war prestige and enrichment to guerrillas (Kriger 2003). Civilian supporters—whose support was changeable over time and at time shifted between ZANU and ZAPU depending on ethnicity, location and an area’s pre-
war history—counted not only on promises of land but often benefited from the guerrillas’
development of alternative governance structures and social service provision.

In addition to collective material incentives, Zimbabwean guerrillas employed
violence to ensure popular support. Lyons points to “the legacy of fear” that infiltrates the
minds of voters as they prepare to participate in a form of political struggle that has been
unfamiliar to them prior to and throughout internal conflict. “Voters in postconflict
elections often choose to use the limited power of their franchise either to appease the most
powerful faction in the hope of preventing a return to war or to select the most nationalistic
and chauvinistic candidate who credibly pledges to protect the voter’s community” (2005,
61). Intimidation played a role in shaping civilians’ political backing of the rebels and thus
the confidence of the rebels as they entered peace talks.

The fact that each nationalist leader believed he could win an independence election
accounts in large part for the success of the British in producing an agreement at Lancaster
House. Mugabe, Nkomo and Muzorewa each believed that he had sufficient popular support
to win. Rebel leaders’ perceptions of their own popular support were a critical component of
their decisions to abandon the conflict. The mediators intentionally cultivated a sense of
plausible victory for all warring parties, employing the legitimization provided by an election
to induce cooperation.

Not only is war politics by other means in Zimbabwe, as in Clausewitz’s formulation;
war is a part of politics in Zimbabwe. The nationalist movement remained divided on ZAPU
and ZANU lines during the liberation struggle and afterwards. Some white Rhodesians’
predictions of tribal-based conflict did not materialize in the aftermath of the initial post-
settlement election. However, the divisions between ZAPU and ZANU sparked greater violence between ZANLA and ZIPRA former combatants as the rebels’ internal antagonism solidified following Mugabe’s decision to run without ZAPU in the 1980 election and ZANLA’s resultant elevated status. ZIPRA’s active animosity toward ZANLA and ZANU targets increased, and the result was a bloodbath in Matabeleland.

Negotiating Democratization: Impact of Electoral System Type on Rebels’ Decision to Enter Politics

The decision of the nationalist rebels ultimately to accept the agreement was directly linked to the guarantees and incentives negotiated at Lancaster House. Among these assurances were the intricacies of the political system that would take root in Zimbabwe's nascent independent period and lay the groundwork for the initial election in February 1980. Generally, the political system that all parties understood to be at stake even before the talks began was Western-style electoral democracy. The PF’s acceptance of the electoral system as it was packaged at Lancaster House meant providing whites with an inflated level of guaranteed representation in parliament. Mugabe and the PF accepted this system even as they abandoned definitive aims of the liberation struggle, including equal rights to the land for blacks and full, genuine self-determination–majority rule without guarantees to the régime. It is not unreasonable to argue that Mugabe’s calculation about accepting the agreement and its electoral provisions entailed a strategy based on winning power and having a mandate to change the rules of the game later. Indeed its negotiating strategy often reflected this general approach to resolution of the conflict and the ensuing arrangement.
For Mugabe, embracing electoral democracy was a means of assuring and legitimizing his accession to power following the war. While the number of seats reserved for whites concerned Mugabe and the nationalist leaders, the particular system under discussion—as long as it allowed for “one man, one vote”—was not a major consideration for the rebels in coming to the table and entering politics. Electoral system institutions and the constitutional structure of government could have been more favorable to ZANU than what was employed. ZANU would have been better served by a non-PR and non-parliamentary system, given its strength as the largest party (Shugart 1992, 131 cf. 7). The ZANU government later replaced PR with a one-seat district plurality system and an elected presidency. As Shugart argues, international monitoring of the election provided guarantees to the rebels and reduced their costs of participation, but the system was not designed to help the rebels win a greater share of seats or executive power through institutional reforms.

What mattered was allowing the rebels to benefit at the table from their distinct military advantage over the régime and compete in an election with the overwhelming support of a large majority of the population. Due to this imbalance, as Shugart suggests, guarantees were made to the Rhodesian government to lower the cost of its tolerating rebel participation in the system. These guarantees ensured an overrepresentation of the white minority in the assembly. ZANU received assurances in the form of an armed Commonwealth election monitoring force. The more than 22,000 ZANU/ZAPU rebels mostly complied with disarmament as a condition for the continuation of support from Britain, Mozambique and South Africa (Shugart 1992, 131-3). The rebel leaders’ original demands for power-sharing during the ceasefire and transition period were not fulfilled: the British insisted on a much shorter transition than the six months Mugabe requested, and
there was no transfer of any state power or control of security forces to ZANU/ZAPU before the elections.

ZANU’s anticipated voter support was so strong that Mugabe decided that maintaining the joint rebel coalition was unnecessary to achieve sufficient political space to crowd out the régime. The PF tactical alliance served during the peace process as a means of presenting the rebels as an ascendant, united movement. Mugabe’s decision shortly before the election to run without ZAPU and Nkomo revealed both the extreme advantage of ZANU over ZAPU and the other electoral contenders and Mugabe’s ambition. Though the constitution guaranteed a multi-party system for ten years, ZANU(PF) party officials rallied supporters with calls for one-party rule within the first year of its 1980 election victory (Kriger 2005, 5).

While providing disproportionate advantages to whites, the electoral system agreed upon at Lancaster House–while not an embodiment of liberation from colonial and white dominance as envisioned in the nationalist struggle–provided the political space that the guerrillas perceived would allow them to pursue those objectives with an electoral mandate. Mugabe gave up full land reclamation–the definitive grievance of the struggle for liberation and self-determination. Some analysts argue that liberty and constitutionalism were won at the negotiating table, but liberation was seen to be lost.

Conclusions

Violence continues to figure centrally in political contention in Zimbabwe. The divisive implications of a colonial legacy, a racially-defined struggle over access to resources,
and ethnic tensions among blacks became worsened as nationalist parties and the Rhodesian régime went to war. In the lead-up to the assumption of power by the African nationalists through elections and independence in 1980, all-or-nothing perceptions of the struggle for political power and control of government were manifest in a climate of intense intimidation and violence by security forces.

Without a grounded history in the country, democratic elections were seen as a tool for marginalized sectors to seize the reins of power and ensure that it remained in their hands. The exigencies of international trends of decolonization, a regional revolutionary upward trajectory and the conflicted internal relationship between rebel leadership and the guerrillas were among the defining characteristics of the environment in which the Lancaster House agreement was shaped and emerged. Internal actors invested little in the process of negotiations that were focused wholly on the product and little on substance. Any analysis of the implications of Lancaster House must take into account the rebels’ use of violence and intimidation during the conflict and on election day. Guerrilla forces, instructed to remain in ZANU-controlled communities to maintain order at polling stations—in violation of the ceasefire and disarmament—were tasked with ensuring voters’ support of ZANU through fear-mongering and physical violence (Krige 2005, 4-5).

The outcome of the peace process was an agreement steered by external actors that seemed at once thrown together and wound tightly, with significant compromises and simultaneously, no genuine commitment by combatants. The rebels perceived international involvement as necessary to their assumption of legitimate authority and exploited the peace process as much as the mediators depended on their commitment to it. In the end, the rebels
calculated that preserving the authority they gained through guerrilla war and negotiations required the sustained use of violence against political dissent.
Map of El Salvador. By Carolyn Resnicke
3  The FMLN and El Salvador’s Democratic Revolution

On March 17, 2009, President-elect Mauricio Funes vowed to bring hope and change to El Salvador, revitalize the small Central American country’s economy and strengthen relations with the United States (Booth 2009, A09). In a contest with impressive sixty percent voter turnout, the election of Funes, a first-time politician and former television journalist represents the rise to power of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the leftist party founded by guerrillas in 1994 following a peace accord and civil conflict that killed 75,000 people. Since then, the FMLN rebels-turned-politicians have constituted the main opposition party—without a presidential electoral victory to date—in a political system dominated since the 1980s by the conservative National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party. Legislative elections in January 2009 demonstrated a clear consolidation of political authority by the FMLN, which gained 35 seats over ARENA’s 32. In the eyes of the former guerrilla party, the democratic revolution initiated in the 1970s has come full circle.

After over a decade of civil war, the rebels and the régime signed the Chapultepec Peace Accords in January 1992 in Mexico City, signaling a widening of political opportunities for all Salvadorans—a definitive element of the FMLN’s revolutionary platform during the war. What advantages did the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional perceive in negotiating an end to civil conflict and transition to electoral struggle? What was the military status of the conflict, and how did this shape their considerations? What institutional,
organizational and external factors and incentives shaped the anticipated benefits of armed struggle for the rebels? How did they perceive that politics would serve their revolutionary objectives?

To begin to address these questions, an understanding of conflict background and dynamics, and the “ripe moment” (Zartman 1989) that led the belligerents to seek peace is presented in the first section of the chapter. The subsequent three sections will analyze the various impacts of international influence, civilian support and the electoral system on the FMLN’s entrance into the political system. The rebels’ decision to abandon armed struggle and enter politics rested on several interactive factors: the military status of the conflict, which by 1989 had reached a stalemate; the anticipated international legitimacy that the peace process would afford the FMLN; and the domestic electoral benefits the movement anticipated on the basis of the its efforts to achieve political revolution in the countryside.

**Conflict Context: Background and Dynamics of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992)**

The origins of civil war in El Salvador can be traced to the institutionalized alliance of the economic elite and the military—a relationship that has caused comparable inequality and instability in other Central American countries. As unequal conditions, poverty and unrest generated social movements in the 1970s, the Salvadoran state countered with repressive policies designed to eliminate all forms and faces of subversive, leftist behavior. The guerrilla movement provided expression for the emergent social and political forces of this period.
The majority of Salvadorans were excluded from “all but the most meager life opportunities” (Wood 2003, 11). The expansion of coffee production in the late nineteenth century displaced the country’s indigenous communities, as competition for their land and labor put them in conflict with commercial and government elites. The expropriation of landholders resulted in the control of the best agricultural land by two small groups—plantation owners and coffee processors. Indigenous people were forced into bonded labor and landlessness. An indigenous uprising in 1932 was crushed by government forces, leaving 17,000 dead and rural residents silenced, without political or other recourse from the control of daily life by the security forces that protected landed interests and economic production (Wood 2003, 20-24).

The early signs of what would become the FMLN guerrilla insurgency emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s, when demands for land reform and increased political inclusion sparked the development of community-based organizations. Their reform efforts directly challenged the alliance of the military and landed oligarchy that controlled all land and economic production. Civilian groups mobilized in response to political discrimination: popular participation was restricted in elections, and fraud was common. Radical leftist organizations and urban trade unions which were established and coordinated by the few armed revolutionary groups operating in the country at the time expanded in the cities and organized frequent demonstrations and strikes. Political mobilization expanded rapidly in the countryside. In realizing that their only means to effect change—through the ballot—was unavailable, the campesinos who joined the movements perceived “no other way out” (Goodwin 2001) than armed struggle. Significant tensions and violence escalated over the course of the 1970s before the war’s full outbreak. The political climate in the country
worsened as the organizations’ efforts were met with increasingly brutal repression and violent confrontations.

Amid the divisive effects of armed resistance on the ruling establishment, a small sect of young, reform-minded military officers in 1979 carried out a coup and took power of the Salvadoran government. In response, senior officers led by Major General Roberto d’Aubuisson exercised severe repression against any groups or individuals suspected of collusion with leftist forces. With the support of the economic elites, d’Aubuisson's conservative cohort ousted the short-lived reformist junta in 1980, later joined by civilian politicians from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Christian Democrat José Napoléon Duarte was later named president of the junta (Byrne 1996, 94). (He later ran as the PDC candidate in the 1984 presidential elections and won in a second-round runoff). In 1980, more than 1,500 people were killed monthly as a result of political violence. The assassination in March of that year of Archbishop Oscar Romero the day after he called on government soldiers to refuse to obey orders (Wood 2003, 26-7)—and the firing by armed forces on people marching at his funeral, killing 40—were catalyzing moments for wider participation in opposing the state.

In November 1980, the FMLN was founded, encompassing five guerrilla organizations that were formed in the 1970s to advocate resistance against the government’s unjust policies and a struggle for political representation of marginalized groups. The five organizations were the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL); the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL); the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP); the National Resistance (RN); and the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PTRC). The FMLN and opposition political parties soon forged a common front, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR)-
FMLN. France, Mexico and the Socialist International officially recognized the FMLN-FDR as a “representative political force,” affirming its status as a broad-based social movement (Ryan 1994, 38). In January 1981, the newly consolidated FMLN launched a joint military attack—called the “final offensive”—intended to overthrow the régime, which failed.

**Escalation of the Conflict and Settlement**

Following this defeat, the FMLN retreated from the cities and gradually acquired control of rural areas in eastern, central and northern parts of the country, comparable to the pockets of Tribal Trust Lands in which ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas operated during the Rhodesian conflict. The FMLN’s strategy emphasized large-scale attacks on military and economic infrastructure targets. Between 1981 and 1983, the rebels gained ground on government forces and expanded its control of territory. The military attacked FMLN-controlled areas without discrimination, and death squads executed civilians suspected of supporting the armed opposition.

In response to the state’s brutal violence against civilians, in late 1983 U.S. officials conditioned its provision of funding, training and arms supplies to the Salvadoran armed forces on improvement of its human rights record and restraint of the military (Wood 2003, 29). In the 1984 presidential election and in legislative polls a year later, the Christian Democratic party won, allowing the United States to reinstate and strengthen military aid to El Salvador in support of a government viewed internationally as more legitimate and moderate in its war against the insurgents. The shift in government strategy away from violence against civilians that followed had multiple effects: the FMLN’s reorganization into small, mobile units and covert infiltration of wider rural and urban areas; a shift in the
rightist ARENA party toward more moderate leaders and away from d’Aubuisson to appeal to a wider constituency; and a reaffirmation of U.S. material support. From 1984 to 1989, the FMLN’s transition to covert guerrilla tactics coincided with a deliberate strategy of renewing its political efforts and the “reactivation of the masses” (Byrne 1996, 158) that the rebels saw as critical to demonstrating that the counterinsurgency policy was failing. All insurgent strategies at this time were oriented toward a planned counteroffensive attack combined with a violent popular uprising that would lead to an unquestionable takeover of power by the rebels (158-160).

Carrying out the murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her sixteen-year-old daughter was the Salvadoran High Command’s reaction to the successful FMLN offensive into San Salvador in November 1989, when it occupied two wealthy suburbs of the city for several days. The Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador later named President Alfredo Cristiani of the ruling ARENA party as having ordered the assassinations (Truth Commission 1993, 45-54). The murders shocked the nation, resulted in a suspension of U.S. military aid conditioned on progress in peace talks, and in short, forced the parties to the table.

"Stalemate, Peace Talks and an Agreement"

The FMLN’s 1989 offensive was a turning point in the conflict, providing a signal to both parties that neither was positioned to win militarily anytime soon. Perceptions of the “mutually hurting stalemate” led the government and the FMLN to approach the United Nations separately for assistance in December. Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Álvaro de Soto led the negotiations, which began in Geneva in April 1990
Negotiations of a series of accords took place over a two-year period and ended in a final peace agreement on December 31, 1991. The government agreed to reduce and reconstruct the military, disband the security forces and establish a new civilian police force that included FMLN members. The judiciary and electoral systems would undergo significant reforms, the latter to include a broader spectrum of political parties (de Soto et al 1995, 192). The rebels committed to disarm, accept the terms of the existing constitution and enter the political system as a legal party.

A newly formed National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ), comprising two representatives each from the government and the FMLN and one representative from every other political party, would oversee implementation of the accords. The agreement established a Truth Commission to investigate and document wartime human rights violations and a U.N. observer and verification mission (ONUSAL). The U.N. mission was to monitor and verify ceasefire violations, the separation of forces and the disarmament and demobilization of FMLN combatants. In February 1992 a formal ceasefire began. In December of that year, when the FMLN had fully disarmed and demobilized as verified by ONUSAL, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal recognized the FMLN as a legally constituted political party.

International and Regional Influence on the Rebels: A Driver of Conflict and Compromise

El Salvador’s “negotiated revolution” (Karl 1992)–the peace process between the government and the FMLN in which the United Nations played a powerful mediating role–
redrew the lines of legitimacy, contention and politics in society. U.N. SRSG Álvaro de Soto argues that the accords aimed to eradicate the causes of the conflict: “a militarized society, riven by profound economic and social inequalities and a closed political system” (de Soto et al 1995, 189). The Salvadoran peace process was the first time the United Nations acted as a mediator in a civil war (Whitfield 1999, quoted in Wade 2008, 38).

While proponents of regional peace efforts and the United Nations—in particular, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and de Soto—played a central role in ending the civil war, other external actors—particularly the United States, Cuba and Nicaragua—shaped the formation of the FMLN insurgency, the evolution of the conflict and the strategies of the government and the rebels on the ground. The rebels’ decision to disarm and abandon armed struggle and ultimately the success of the peace process depended on the presence of a military stalemate and the demonstrated will of both parties toward negotiated settlement. As decisively, the changing nature of the international environment and the shifting interests of major international actors permitted the building of political momentum, capacity and the possibility for compromise that led to an agreement accommodating the interests of both parties.

Revolution, Ideology and Cold War Politics—Cuba, Nicaragua and the United States in El Salvador

The geopolitical landscape that framed the external dimensions of the Salvadoran conflict interacted in significant ways with the internal incompatibility between the rebels and the régime, shaping the actors’ interests, identities and capabilities. The end of the Cold War altered the strategic environment for both parties to the civil conflict (Call 2002, 387). As a result of the Soviet collapse, the continued material assistance and ideological connection of regional allies Cuba and Nicaragua, on whose enormous logistical support and
solidarity the FMLN relied, was likely to decline. Moreover, Call argues that the Cold War’s end removed an ideological framework that had influenced the FMLN’s vision for post-conflict El Salvador (2002, 387). The rebels then more clearly embraced democratization; worked within the realistic parameters of the conflict and impasse; and were more willing to compromise at the negotiating table. The thinking of the U.S. government changed with the shift from the Reagan administration to that of George H.W. Bush, and the United States, along with the Soviet Union, expressed public support for negotiations—which until the communist threat no longer loomed, had constituted too large a risk. Without U.S. material support, the peace process became a significantly more attractive option to the Salvadoran military, particularly following the rebels’ 1989 offensive and the emergence of a mutually-hurting stalemate.

The FMLN insurgency developed in the immediate wake of a successful Sandinista guerrilla campaign in neighboring Nicaragua, which had ended with the toppling of the Somoza régime in July 1979. The Sandinistas’ success was in part determined by support from the Soviet Union and Cuba. The momentum of rebel victory infected the incipient Salvadoran guerrillas in their early resistance efforts against the state. In a scenario not unlike regional cooperation among the recently victorious revolutionary governments in Mozambique and Zambia and their provision of safe haven for Rhodesian and other guerrillas in southern Africa, the Sandinistas offered the FMLN and other Latin American guerrilla groups the use of Nicaragua as a base for operations and weapons shipments. Cuba’s sponsorship of the rebels was contingent on the merger of the three Salvadoran guerrilla factions, who were in bitter disagreement over the strategic direction the insurgency should adopt. The Cuban régime exerted influence on the joint rebel coalition and together
with Nicaragua secured a regional “clearinghouse” (Moroni 1995) for foreign assistance to
the FMLN. In addition, every guerrilla faction in Latin America, with the exception of Peru’s
Shining Path, contributed to the FMLN war effort, through money, arms and personnel.
The FMLN FDR—the international political arm of the movement—successfully established a
support network that transcended the region, including Vietnam and the Soviet Union,
which provided training and funds until late in the war (Moroni 1995, 6-7). This
impenetrable flow of aid sustained the FMLN throughout the conflict and variously
impacted rebel calculations about their ability to fight the long war.

The Soviet Union’s decision to halt arms shipments to Nicaragua’s Sandinista
government in early 1989 “knocked the revolutionary perspective off balance,” according to
an FMLN leader (Karl 1992, 151). Rebel leaders began to distance themselves from the
socialist revolution and called for multi-party democracy.

The United States impacted the development of the conflict in fundamental ways. It
played a role attributed to political elites who are in control of strategic spikes in violence
during civil war peace processes: the U.S. government was able indirectly to “turn the tap”
(Sisk 2009) of violence on and off through its actions and reactions in the face of brutal
warfare and rights violations in El Salvador. Fluctuations in U.S. military assistance—
calibrated by varied, inconsistent commitments to human rights-based conditions and
geopolitical strategy to preclude the ascent of another communist government in the region—
shaped the advantages and outcomes of the conflict on the battlefield. When the United
States provided increased assistance to the Salvadoran government in 1979, it did so with
conditions: the military junta had to incorporate the Christian Democratic party into
government, elections had to be held and agrarian reform had to be carried out (Wood 2003,

Developments in U.S. politics affected the amount and kind of assistance it provided to the Salvadoran government. From 1979 to 1981, the focus of the Carter administration’s policy toward El Salvador was preventing the rise of a leftist, pro-communist government as had occurred in Nicaragua; and on effecting human rights protections by linking aid disbursement to improvements in compliance with rights standards determined by the U.S. Congress. Carter withdrew aid immediately following the murders of several U.S. citizens working in El Salvador in December 1980–three American nuns and a laywoman–and two land reform advisors the following month.

The FMLN’s timing of its “final offensive” in January 1981 was intended to bring the guerrillas to power before President Ronald Reagan’s inauguration later in the month. The failure of the offensive boosted the urgency of U.S. aid to El Salvador, and Congress approved $10 million in assistance before Reagan assumed office. The Reagan administration increased aid to the Salvadoran military—in the form of training, funds, arms and helicopters—as the war progressed. Until the end of the Cold War, the Reagan government succeeded in ramping up economic and military aid to El Salvador—first by executive decree and later by congressional appropriation. A decisive shift in U.S. foreign policy under President George H.W. Bush away from a military-based strategy toward clear support for a negotiated solution in part made possible an end to the war (Karl 1992, 159-60).
The efforts of U.S. citizens to draw policymakers’ attention to violence by Salvadoran state actors against civilians and to the U.S. role in training and arming the security forces led U.S. government officials in late 1983 to pressure and convince Salvadoran military leaders to curb the military’s human rights violations. This precipitated a rapid decline in war-related deaths beginning in 1984 (Wood 2003, 28).

While the direct sponsors of the warring parties exercised critical leverage on the régime and the guerrillas, including by shaping their evolving strategies and goals, the United Nations as a mediator and the FMLN’s international supporters—including Mexico, Costa Rica, Norway and other European governments—played important roles in facilitating the battlefield-to-negotiating table transition. Their financial and technical assistance at key moments of the peace process maintained the momentum of the negotiations and contributed to implementation efforts and transitional institution-building.

Other Forms of International Influence on the Rebels and the Conflict

When the military stalemate became evident to the warring parties following the 1989 San Salvador offensive, the FMLN approached the United Nations with a request for assistance in negotiating a settlement, which was followed by a similar request from the Cristiani government (Wade 2008, 38). Stalemate, for the rebels, signaled an opportune moment for the involvement of U.N. mediators. They believed that the legitimization of an internationally-sponsored peace process was critical to their voices being heard during negotiations and preventing the gains of the armed struggle from being lost at the table. The ‘good offices’ of U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, who took a particular interest in negotiating an end to the conflict by the end of his term, were critical in
conveying that the United Nations was committed to bringing a settlement to fruition; Pérez de Cuéllar, a Peruvian, believed that his successor, likely not also a Latin American, would not take the same interest in ending El Salvador’s conflict. It must be noted that the United Nations, stinging from botched interventions in African conflicts in the early 1990s, was particularly interested in a successful Salvadoran peace process to rebuild confidence in the institution’s ability to carry out its mission of international peace and security. The U.N. commitment to democratic stabilization in El Salvador was unprecedented, however, and its role in “the resolution of an internal conflict from start to finish” (Call 2002, 384)–from mediation, observation and verification to electoral oversight–was essential to the success of the process.

 Members of the FMLN’s international political liaison, the Political Diplomatic Commission, were sent to 33 countries as official representatives to generate support for the movement. The FMLN enjoyed significant support from the governments of Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Solidarity and diaspora groups in the United States, Europe and Latin America–many composed of Salvadoran refugees–provided political and material support to the rebels and were critical to building opposition against U.S. policies in El Salvador (Söderberg Kovacs 2007, 79). During the post-agreement transition the FMLN received a large amount of support from Social Democratic parties, trade unions and NGOs in Norway, Sweden and Spain–including the leasing of office space, financial assistance and the training of party representatives and candidates (Wade 2008, 48).

 In addition to international recognition and support for the rebels, the regional commitment to peace and democracy by the Central American presidents during the 1986-87 Esquipulas peace process constructed an environment conducive to a negotiated
settlement in El Salvador. In an initiative led by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, the Esquipulas Accords emphasized proposals calling for democratization, arms control negotiations and national reconciliation. It was signed by five Central American presidents in 1987 while civil conflicts were raging in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. The initiative provided momentum for the move toward settlement in El Salvador.

In an article in *Foreign Policy* in the spring of 1989, FMLN commander Joaquín Villalobos’ defended Marxism-Leninism as a social science theory, not a militant revolutionary ideology. Moreover, in an attempt to secure international visibility and support for a credible FMLN vision and struggle, Villalobos argued that the FMLN’s military tactics are aimed at securing the support of society in pursuit of a “broad, democratic and realistic historical goal” (1989, 107). In the context of the end of the Cold War, his ideas assumed a conciliatory but defensive tone. The rebels wanted to hold onto the notion of revolution and maintain international recognition as a representative, legitimate force in Salvadoran politics.

The government shared the FMLN’s aim of gaining international legitimacy and approval. During the transition period and following elections, the Government and the FMLN requested that the U.N. Observer Mission ONUSAL’s mandate be renewed (de Soto 1995, 193). The desire for an extended source of legitimate, external verification can be compared to Mugabe’s request that British administration in the pre-election period be six months long as opposed to the eight weeks proposed by the Thatcher government. While Mugabe’s motivation was in part explained by concerns about the return of thousands of refugee ZANU-PF supporters from Mozambique and their registration as voters, the parties’ reliance on an international guarantor illustrates the advantage that international legitimacy provides rebels and régimes in transitions from war. In El Salvador and Zimbabwe,
preserving order and peace following an agreement was in the interest of the rebels who anticipated a renewed opportunity for demonstrating their political legitimacy in upcoming elections.

**Popular Support for the FMLN—Transforming Guerrilla War into Votes**

In Maoist military doctrine guerrillas are likened to fish swimming in a sea of peasants, who provide logistical support to the rebel militants. The overall guiding strategy of the FMLN during the Salvadoran civil conflict was “Prolonged Popular War”—a term borrowed from Asian revolutionary thought—which in El Salvador took the form of politico-military guerrilla warfare (Moroni 1995, 13-15). By 1983, when the FMLN had gained a strong foothold in rural areas and established military operations throughout the country, it shifted its focus to building political relations with civilians through social service provisions and establishing local “popular” governments (Call 2002, 385-6). The rebels aimed to secure the peasants’ logistical coordination—or at minimum, to prevent them from aiding the régime. The rebels’ fundamental strategy was to isolate the people from the armed forces and prevent the military from gaining political support, combined with strengthening the political capacity and connections of the FMLN with “the masses” (Byrne 1996, 132-3).

The centrality of land to the conflict created an immediate constituency as it did in Rhodesia, and the early supporters of resistance based on land and labor reform provided a critical foundation on which the FMLN sought to build its political project. In addition, the FMLN used appeals to ideology and solidarity to construct support among civilians. Social justice, particularly with regard to land, was a rallying cry for the rebels in mobilizing
marginalized groups in the country (Lyons 2005, 46). Exploiting class differences as a basis for mobilization may be a rebel strategy designed to co-opt marginalized, resource-poor groups who have no recourse to other means of representation or protection in a climate of insecurity. These groups, like the rebels, feel that they have “no other way out” (Goodwin 2001), and the insurgents capitalize on this sense of impoverishment and injustice among the “marginalized have-nots” (Lyons 2005, 47).

In distributing “selective incentives,” the FMLN leaders and militants provided targeted services to the rural poor, including redistribution of land and the coordination of development projects. The FMLN also charged war taxes in areas where it operated from “zonas controladas” (Moroni 1995, 46). Some Salvadorans participated in high-risk collective action, even when the collective benefits of redistributed land, for example were available to those who did not participate because participants valued the “pleasure of agency” (Wood 2003) that peasants gained in making their own history. “The resolution of the puzzle of collective action depends on emotional processes, moral perceptions, and shifting political culture as well as on the emergence of insurgent social networks and widening political opportunity” (2003, 20).

As demonstrated by the key role played by guerrillas and war veterans in Zimbabwe, the most important and accessible constituency of a rebel movement may be its soldiers. Who comprised FMLN combatant forces? The majority of insurgent combatants were from poor rural backgrounds (McClintock 1998, 266-7). During the early years of the war, the rebels expanded their forces from a few hundred combatants in 1981 to several thousand by 1984. This recruitment—much of it forced—occurred in the countryside. Moroni cites the
permanent effort of the FMLN to recruit combatants and expand its support base as a fundamental reason for its survival (1995, 6-10).

**Expansion of Political Opportunity for FMLN Constituents**

El Salvador’s “unequal distribution of land, income and opportunity and its maintenance by coercive labor practices” (Wood 2003, 24) resulted in a campesino political culture until the late 1960s in which resistance was quieted by self-censored peasants. Landless laborers lacked schooling or any opportunity for upward mobility and were dependent on their employers for shelter, food and work. The prospects for change were dim given the severe repression by military security forces of any attempts to organize or enact land tenure reforms. The rural poor were politically excluded until the 1970s, when liberation theology—including the notion of social justice—and the efforts of the Christian Democratic party and covert guerrilla organizations reached them and fueled gradual political mobilization in the countryside. The opportunities for political activity widened exponentially, and as a result, in the areas where politicization and grassroots organizing had no history, popular support for the rebels was high (Wood 2003).

The expansion of wartime opportunities had implications for post-conflict political participation: the campesinos-turned-fully franchised citizens, in the immediate aftermath of a violent struggle for political rights and access to land in which they have been direct participants, cast votes in a renovated political milieu. The process of re-enfranchisement was neither inevitable nor bloodless, and people’s decisions to contribute or take up arms were sometimes made for them. However, through the war, the campesinos became agents of social change and acquired a political identity, despite high risks and often little protection...
offered by the FMLN in return for their support. “Most civilian insurgents appeared to support the guerrilla forces not out of an illusory desire for protection but out of their deepening conviction that the government no longer merited their loyalty or acquiescence” (Wood 2003, 120).

Popular support in rural communities–and in urban areas, which entailed different kinds of civilian cooperation–was inconsistent and changeable. Diverse modes of mobilization by the rebels–including forced recruitment and organizing workers around calls for labor reform–varied with shifts in the FMLN strategy over time and with the risks to civilians of involvement in providing aid to rebels. The forms of collective action differ depending on multiple, interactive factors–for example, militants’ needs, community benefits and the level of state-sponsored violence. Though outside the scope of this research, within-case analysis of different types, degrees and motivations of popular backing over time and in different locations would generate concrete understanding of complex processes, aiding in theory development. As the FMLN strategy evolved over the twelve-year period of armed conflict, the level of campesino participation fluctuated, developing endogenously and gaining its own momentum. As a military stalemate approached, this trend only drove the rebels closer to peace talks.

**Impact of the Electoral System on Rebels’ Decision to Become Politicians**

Samuel Huntington argued that “perhaps the most important and obvious but also most neglected fact about successful great revolutions is that they do not occur in democratically elected systems” (Huntington 1968, 275). This trend is likely not due to an inherent immunity of democratic systems to revolutionary penetration, but the historical
pattern highlights the difficulty that non-state actors face in constructing a sufficiently large and viable coalition against the government, which has entrenched advantages and the support of at least certain sectors of society (Ryan 1994). The FMLN did not manage to overthrow an elected government, but the proportional representation (PR) electoral system permitted the rebels opportunities in the post-conflict election that would not have been available under another system. Proponents of institutionalist, and rational choice perspectives seek to advance the idea that rebel groups will agree to enter the political arena due in part to the incentives they anticipate as a result of the particular type of electoral system in place—or reforms that might be made to the system that favor their participation (Shugart 1992).

Ryan sees prospects of revolutionary success as dependent on the scope of the revolutionaries’ anti-régime coalition in terms of size and socio-political breadth (1994, 29). Some scholars have characterized the process of coalition-building in revolutionary situations as a direct competition between the rebels and the régime (Wickham-Crowley 1992). The FMLN indeed conceptualized the civil conflict in this way: their politico-military efforts were centered on “crowding out” the government and ensuring that the régime’s political influence and propaganda, recruitment strategies and defense of status quo policies did not reach or persuade the people. This required a significant amount of mobilization in part because rural Salvadorans had become “acquiescent” (Wood 2003) over years of political marginalization and systemic discrimination. As discussed in the previous section, the FMLN’s efforts in some areas of the countryside to co-opt the campesinos met with varying success over time and in different locations.
Scholars have long emphasized the implications of institutional engineering—particularly of electoral systems—in democratization processes. Electoral system design is used as a tool in constitutional engineering to mitigate conflict in divided societies and an important mechanism for shaping wider political practices that have an impact beyond the elections (Reilly 2002, 127). Shugart identifies electoral incentives and reforms as important considerations in a rebel group’s decision to negotiate a political settlement to an internal conflict and compete in democratic elections. Peace agreements that lead to elections out of which guerrillas emerge as political parties can be understood as “a product of calculations of the costs of continued conflict versus the costs of electoral competition for each side” (Shugart 1992, 121).

Certain institutional rules and reforms provide particular opportunities to guerrillas in their transitions to politics. New political parties are more likely to emerge and succeed where candidates are elected in PR legislative systems rather than in single-member voting districts (Taagepara and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 2004). By preventing the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of political parties, most forms of PR voting allow for more parties—particularly outsider or smaller parties—to participate in representative bodies and succeed politically even when they capture only a small percentage of the vote (Allison 2006, 152). PR rules are likely to facilitate proportional parliamentary representation of all parties regardless of the extent or distribution of their support base; PR particularly encourages political coalition-building (Reilly 2002, 127-130). In El Salvador, 84 delegates to the unicameral legislative body, the National Assembly, are elected for three-year terms through a two-tiered district PR voting system. Voters cast a single ballot for the party of their
choice; this ballot is then applied to candidate lists at both the district and national levels (Allison 2006, 155).

Comparative electoral system analysis of presidential contests demonstrates that a majority runoff system facilitates the accession to politics of a new political party more easily than plurality electoral rules (Carey et al 1992). If no candidate receives a majority—50 percent of the vote plus one—a runoff is held between the two candidates with the highest vote in the first round.

_Institutional Reform and Widened Democratic Space: Incentives for the FMLN’s Embrace of Politics_

Reform of the electoral system in El Salvador was a critical component of the democratic transition that preceded, paralleled and followed the armed conflict. One of the most important legacies of the Chapultepec Peace Accords was its transformation of the FMLN into a legal political party (Allison 2006, 145). In addition to this transition which itself served as a major democratic aperture and incentive in the eyes of the rebels, liberalization of the electoral system to mandate full participation by all sectors of the eligible electorate was an essential rebel demand and a primary _raison d’être_ of the FMLN. This process of political opening took place beginning in the early 1980s, when the rebels’ “final offensive” posed an early version of stalemate: though the attack failed, the FMLN demonstrated its capacity to mount military operations throughout the country and that the FMLN-FDR political coalition was large and broad enough to generate a political and military stalemate (Ryan 1994, 38).
Initial electoral reforms began with the 1983 constitution drafted by a 60-member constituent assembly elected the year before, following the takeover in 1980 by the military junta. The constitution established a more pluralistic political system and arranged for presidential and legislative elections to be held in 1984 and 1985, respectively; these were deemed the most free and fair elections in El Salvador in fifty years. Throughout failed peace talks in 1984, the FMLN demanded significant changes to the electoral system be made prior to their participation in elections; its costs of resistance and continued armed conflict remained relatively low. The rebels did not participate in the 1985 elections and boycotted elections in 1989 (Shugart 1992, 140). To induce the rebels away from armed struggle, any new political system would have to include concessions from the régime of sufficient provisions for widening the rebels’ opportunities for electoral participation, specifically through changes to the electoral system.

Amid a mutually-hurting stalemate and the move toward U.N. mediation of peace negotiations in late 1989, the rebels received the concrete institutional opening that justified its abandonment of violence. During peace talks in 1990, a negotiated reform of the electoral system expanded the number of seats from 60 to 84 deputies in an effort to widen the political opportunities available to smaller parties. COPAZ—the multi-party body created by the peace agreement to enact legislation in fulfillment of accord provisions—selected the members of a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal, established through constitutional reform to replace the Central Board of Elections. During the Mexico Agreements in April 1991, the warring parties agreed that the electoral roll would be compiled in such a way that the lists of citizens eligible to vote are published at least twenty days before the date of the election. Legally registered parties would have the right to monitor the preparation, organization,
publication and updating of the electoral rolls through the establishment of an Interpartidaria, a body which incorporated the country’s nine political parties and could be called on to review electoral and judicial reforms (U.N. DPI 1995). These technical reforms provided additional incentives to the FMLN to participate and win seats as a new party in an increasingly inclusive and open system.

In selecting a candidate to run in the 1994 presidential election, the FMLN agreed not to nominate a rebel leader or commander. The FMLN leadership calculated that the Salvadoran population was not ready for as radical a choice as casting a vote for an ex-rebel leader (Söderberg Kovacs 2007, 67). The rebels’ political support was not yet fully consolidated; though the FMLN’s legitimacy-building process was boosted by rebels’ signing the peace agreement–polls showed that the public strongly favored a negotiated solution to the conflict (Ryan 1994, 39)–achieving solid electoral backing require more than cautious election campaign choices. Aware of the public’s vivid memory of wartime violence and its discredited Marxist-Leninist framework, the FMLN strategically sought to expand its political space through coalition-building. The rebels moderated by running in the presidential race on a coalition ticket with the Convergencia Democrática (Democratic Convergence, CD) party–itself a coalition of three leftist parties headed by Rubén Zamora, a longtime political ally of the FMLN.

Salvadoran presidents are elected for five-year terms, without the possibility of consecutive re-election. In the 1994 presidential election, the ARENA candidate Armando Calderón Sol received 49.3 percent of votes and the FMLN-CD candidate Zamora received 25.6 percent. As a result, a runoff became necessary, and Calderón won in a landslide victory–68.3 to 31.6 percent (PDBA 1999). In each of the country’s fourteen departments,
the FMLN received fewer votes in the second round presidential vote than ARENA. Unlike
the results of the February 1980 post-conflict election in Zimbabwe—in which votes cast
clearly delineated ZANU’s and ZAPU’s regional support bases—FMLN support was not
limited to particular areas. The rebels had not consolidated political backing sufficiently
thoroughly to contest the ARENA platform in any one region. In 1994 legislative elections,
the FMLN received 21 out of 84 seats, emerging as the primary opposition party. The
rebels-turned-politicians secured a greater percentage of votes in San Salvador and urban
centers than in rural areas; overall in municipal elections they performed poorly.

Both during and after the war, the FMLN understood the value of cultivating wider
social space to achieve political success. The party’s awareness of its limited, inconsistent
popular backing throughout the country and its concerns about voters’ perceptions of their
radical identity as a guerrilla movement led them to form a coalition in their first presidential
race. Their strategic calculations were shaped not only by an anticipated higher number of
votes by running with another party, but by their association with leftist revolutionary
ideology amid the end of the Cold War and the disrepute of communist thought. Moreover,
the FMLN’s associations with extant political parties, civil society groups and social
movements that were a product of the widespread grassroots mobilization of the 1970s
informed and enhanced its political organization strategy in the two years leading up to the
1994 elections after the peace agreement had been finalized. Process-tracing of FMLN
decision-making and its refusal to concede demands from the régime—on electoral changes
as well as military and land reforms—until a ripe moment, combined with the government’s
willingness to negotiate, made a U.N.-mediated and verified peace process and
implementation the internationally-legitimizing path which the rebels sought, and the most secure guarantee that the accords would be implemented.

Conclusions

Resolution of the Salvadoran conflict and implementation of the peace accords have been monitored closely since the agreement was signed by the rebels and the Cristiani government. Beyond the establishment of the former rebel movement as the opposition party since the mid-1990s, demilitarization and reform of the security forces is viewed as a critical success of the accords. While rational choice calculations about seats, votes and political space are an insightful analytical tool in the examination of the FMLN’s post-conflict transition to politics—and their anticipated popular backing and capacity to build coalitions—the FMLN’s considerations can be explained by the overall benefits perceived by the rebel movement of its re-constitution as a legal, political actor in an internationally recognized, newly structured electoral system.

The rebels’ perceptions of their legitimized role in the peace process and democratic consolidation of El Salvador—a stated objective of their revolutionary mission, particularly as the end of the war drew closer—were equally important in the strategic transition from violence to contentious politics. The FMLN’s rural supporters—despite high risks and unclear rewards—were a critical force in shaping the rebels’ emergence as a group with which the government had to come to terms for the war to end (Wood 2003, 30). The rebels’ domestic legitimization occurred through “local political processes of insurgency, such as the path-
dependent consequences of political violence and the assertion of agency by long-subordinate people” (2003, 254).

The interaction of two factors—international influence on the rebels and the anticipated reconstructive effects of a reformed electoral system on the political “rules of the game”—emerge in an analysis of rebel decision-making as a salient explanation for the FMLN guerrillas’ commitment to the negotiated settlement of a military conflict that was losing momentum and purpose.
4 Dynamics of constitutive interaction in transitions from violence to politics

Efforts to understand modern civil wars and their termination require examination of the interactions between states and non-state entities battling for control of government. The strategic behavior of actors in internal conflict relies on the manipulation of violence and collective incentives in a struggle to build legitimacy—participation as a legal actor in a political system of accepted rules and standards. A growing number of civil wars and separatist conflicts, particularly in the post-Cold War era, have been resolved peacefully through negotiated settlements in which rebels disarmed and entered the political arena. In other conflicts revolutionaries have held fast to violence and continued to shun the political system. Comparative analysis of the El Salvador and Zimbabwe case studies aims to get at the conditions under which rebel movements engaged in violent conflict with states decide to disarm and participate as political actors.

The circumstances characterizing the environments in which rebels make the decision to enter politics—including international influence on the rebel movement, characteristics of domestic political institutions and level of popular support for the rebels—have a traceable impact on the rebel decision-making. A more nuanced understanding of the reasons that insurgents enter politics will contribute to potential explanations for variations in rebel groups’ post-war political status—whether or not they become functioning parties—
and in the durability of peace. In examining the roles that factors such as political incentives, violence and civilian support play in relations among states and non-state domestic actors, the dynamics of transitional decision-making by rebels who have taken up arms against the state are illustrative of when, how and why civil wars come to an end. Studying them may spur the gradual development of a theory of transformation from violence to politics within states.

**Transitions from Violence to Politics**

Aside from the “credible commitment” provided by a third-party guarantor of the belligerents’ safety in the post-conflict period, few explanations exist for the decisive termination of civil wars (Walter 1997, 340). Rationalists point to the cost-benefit calculations of combatants as impediments to the resolution of intrastate wars: domestic enemies will only settle if they believe they could do no better by continuing to fight or continuing to bargain. Walter describes the “ideational school” as comprised of those who view civil wars as “intense value conflicts” that preclude compromise due to their emotional, often identity-linked nature (Walter 1997, 343). Amid this simplistic conceptual background, in an effort toward theory development, scholars who seek to explain transitions from civil war must contextualize and explore the complex mechanisms and processes that shape the emergence of political alternatives through settlement.

In taking up this challenge, I have sought to address three theoretically-oriented questions about the transition from violence to politics and the mechanisms through which this occurs. First, how do political systems and conventions change to construct conditions
amenable to combatants’ accession to politics, over continuing the conflict militarily? Second, a rebel movement’s calculations about its own popular support—a key consideration in decisions to compete with ballots rather than bullets—are related to the type of electoral system in place and the potential for domestic political reforms to mitigate the costs to the rebels and the regime of political competition versus continuing the conflict (Shugart 1992). How does the relationship between rebels and the civilian population affect these decisions? The social environment in which rebels operate and strategize—and the amount of popular and coalition support they anticipate in an initial post-war election—mold the choices of leaders regarding continuation of fighting or agreeing to compromise. The nature and evolution of the movement’s interests and identity also inform this decision. Third, what impact do external actors have on the conflict among endogenous actors? How do they affect the emergence of changes in rebels’ strategy and interests? This question aims to deconstruct regional and international actors’ varying impacts—constraints and enablement—on the decisive transformation of rebels to politicians.

Elements of a constructivist theoretical approach may help conceptualize the dynamics, interactions and constitutive mechanisms that characterize civil war and the processes that aim to terminate them. These three questions illustrate how different kinds of social structures reshape actors’ interests, self-understandings and behavior (Katzenstein 1996). Through the “reciprocal interaction” (Wendt 1992) of conflict and compromise, agents and structures are mutually constituted.

The chapter will first present conclusions drawn from the case study analysis, addressing each of the three questions in an effort to sketch a path toward a theoretical conception of transition from conflict to politics. Understanding the identities of combatants
and their constituencies; the nature of domestic and international political support; and the rebels’ use of violence are among the elements central to analysis of the rebel-to-politician transformation. A typology outlining the effects of the three variables on rebels’ decision-making follows the conclusions (Figure 3, page 100). Next, I seek to analyze the ways in which constructivist theoretical approaches might be fruitfully applied to transitions from civil wars. Implications for the study of violence in civil war and developing theoretical perspectives on the transformation in this process are presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

Toward a theory of transition from civil conflict: three points of departure

*What is the impact of external actors on actors endogenous to the conflict?*

This question has implications for comparative political analysis of violence-to-politics transitions. While comparative scholars have concentrated on the impact of international norms, institutions and forces on domestic society less frequently and substantively than on the reverse effects, transitions from civil conflict provide an opportunity to examine effects on conflict and change in the international-domestic direction.

The impact of international forces on the rebels in El Salvador and Zimbabwe took comparable forms: the Cold War and the revolutionary agendas of neighboring actors influenced the strategies and interests of the rebels. While the United Nations’ imprint on the Salvadoran peace process and implementation phase is striking, its effect differed significantly from the mediating role of the British in the Rhodesian conflict. U.N. efforts
arguably helped broaden opportunities for constructive engagement among the rebels and the régime in El Salvador. The British mediators’ focus on an outcome in the Lancaster House conference may have encouraged the continuation in the post-conflict period of the zero-sum politics characteristic of Zimbabwe. External actors in both cases served in different ways to legitimize the peace-building processes and the rebel parties themselves.

The interaction of internal actors’ interests and strategies with those of external actors is critical to understanding the Salvadoran rebels’ transition to politics. For example, the FMLN’s adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology shifted as the Cold War drew to a close and Soviet Communism became increasingly discredited. From the movement’s founding, FMLN leaders were concerned with gaining international recognition as well as constructing domestic legitimacy. They aimed to be seen as a political movement with realistic, democratic goals for El Salvador—as Villalobos’ 1989 *Foreign Policy* article aiming to clarify the stance of the FMLN as a visionary, practical rebel movement with an attainable purpose demonstrated.

Though the rebels were not internally unified over objectives and philosophy, in the lead-up to negotiations they aimed to present a coherent face to the United Nations, the international community and the Salvadoran régime. Their domestic-level goals were served by absorbing the impact of the tectonic shift occurring at the international level. Battlefield conditions clearly shaped the rebels’ ripeness for a transition to politics and their growing emphasis on the political dimension of struggle throughout the violent 1980s. But the degree and kind of U.S. assistance to the régime had direct effects on the military status of the conflict and the rebels’ decisions to embrace the bargaining table—a forum moderated and legitimized by the United Nations in its most comprehensive role to date. The FMLN rebels,
as actors engaged in struggles with multiple players—including its own leaders and constituents—became the main opposition party in 1994. Through this transformation, the interactive domestic and international environment in which the conflict unfolded partially reconstituted the rebels’ identity and interests as they entered electoral politics.

ZANU’s and ZAPU’s reliance on neighboring former revolutionaries illustrates multiple-level interaction effects in the Rhodesian case. The Lancaster House conference and agreement emerged from the interaction of regional actors’ demands for an end to the Rhodesian conflict and the strategic dependence of Mugabe and Nkomo on Mozambique and Zambia. Somora Machel’s and Kenneth Kaunda’s pressure on the ZANU/ZAPU leaders to negotiate within the parameters of a British-mediated process was essential to the guerrillas’ decision to come to the table. Mugabe preferred the continuation of the conflict and was prepared to fight the long war, but this was not possible without the assistance and safe haven provided by Mozambique and Zambia. Though their specific ideological motivations differed, Machel’s and Kaunda’s interests in demanding an end to the war were shaped by economic needs; security against Rhodesian military actions against their territories; and the maintenance of their positions in the region as stable post-colonial régimes.

Process tracing of the four negotiation attempts in Rhodesia by various international actors from 1974-1979, culminating in the Lancaster House agreement, illuminates rebels’ decision-making and the importance of iterative attempts at constructing peace. Any break in the mediation efforts would have concentrated so much attention on military activity that the negotiation threshold would have been raised significantly and the chances of achieving a settlement severely damaged (Low 1985, 107). The interactions of external and internal
actors’ perceptions and preferences through the series of mediation attempts by a wide range of external actors shaped what was ultimately on the table; the mediators’ and combatants’ strategies; and the final outcome. In-depth analysis of constitutive mechanisms embedded within international influence on the rebels may increase understanding of a particular case and aid in the development of theoretical conclusions with potentially wider applicability.

In addition to material effects, normative influences also shape the behavior of rebel actors in conflict—often with concrete consequences. International lenders provide aid to governments with the implication that they will implement particular free-market policies. An evolving set of international peace-building norms—human rights standards, reform of security forces and combatant disarmament—generally guide the content of civil war peace agreements. The structural influence of global norms in such contexts not only molds actors’ behavior at the bargaining table but also provides space for external legitimization of internal actors’ efforts. Peceny and Stanley (2001) argue that political adversaries in El Salvador and Guatemala adopted liberal norms to increase their international legitimacy during civil conflict. Internationally mediated negotiations that lead to peace accords demonstrate to combatants that their adversaries have changed their preferences and can be trusted to abandon violence and follow the new political rules of the game. In El Salvador, international intervention and the acceptance by local actors of norms through “liberal social reconstruction” resulted in civil war resolution (Peceny et al 2001, 150-151).

The varied motives of international actors—for example, the United Nations, World Bank, United States—interact with the objectives of rebels and regimes transitioning from conflict. As a result, domestic actors’ interests are shaped to take advantage of what international actors might offer, whether legitimacy or a loophole. The inter-subjectivity of
beliefs regarding the international presence—through mediation, peacekeeping, monitoring of peace agreement implementation, that it serves ultimately to provide an exploitable benefit of some kind—may translate differently to rebel and government actors. What results is a shifting of interests, identities and the adoption and reinforcement of norms through particular role enactments and behavioral practices in transitional periods—at the table, munitions depository or polling station.

In his book on conflict in Bosnia, David Campbell argues that “the settled norms of international society—in particular, the idea that the national community requires the nexus of demarcated territory and fixed identity—were not only insufficient to enable a response to the Bosnian war, they were complicit in and necessary to the conduct of the war itself” (Campbell 1998, 13). Norms, internalized by domestic actors, frame the terms of the debate and shape the parameters of the meaning of conflict, compromise and implementation.

*How do rebels’ popular support and relationship with the civilian population affect decisions to disarm and enter politics?*

Structure and agent are co-constituted in conceptions of rebels’ perceived support among the population and the actions they take as a result of this assessment. If a rebel movement perceives that the degree to which it has mobilized the masses is sufficient to secure a reasonable number of parliamentary seats or for it to act as a spoiler (or prevail) in a presidential competition, then it may choose to enter the race (Shugart 1992, 122). If a group agrees or is pressured to enter an election by internal or external forces and later anticipates a weak performance at the polls, it may renege on a ceasefire or other disarmament commitments and distort the peace-building process.
The FMLN was able to capitalize on popular support in the initial post-conflict election in part because a significant proportion of the population, as disenfranchised and landless or land-poor citizens, supported the rebel cause and were willing to make sacrifices for its advancement. Rebel groups that have failed to gain sufficient backing from civilians were often hampered by an inability to communicate a clear political vision to the population, for example, the RUF in Sierra Leone. Rebel agents who invest in building local support by living “among the people,”–learning local terrain and languages and adopting a sensitivity in their political and military campaigns that reflects the interests of marginalized populations–may inspire reciprocal, longer-term popular investment but may perhaps be expected to provide a greater degree of protection to the population.

The relationship between insurgents and their supporters, allies and associates defies clear typological categorization. The use of comparative, historical narratives has provided fine-grained analyses of the varying effects of rebel mobilization and military strategies in particular areas of civil conflicts–and the complex responses of the population to their efforts. Typically a small proportion of a particular population constitutes the guerrillas’ active supporters–those who serve as informants, combatants, organizers–and the remainder are passive (Kalyvas 2003). Wood found that in several areas in which the FMLN was active in El Salvador about one-third of the members of communities in which she conducted research were actively assisting the rebels (2003, 17).

The collective incentives that rebels provide to local populations are shaped by the particular context of the conflict–its military, social and identity-based characteristics (Lyons 2004, 41). In aiming to secure popular support, rebels use “varying combinations of persuasion and coercion” (Kalyvas 2003, 101). Individuals’ choices to support the guerrilla
movement may be made under conditions of fear and insecurity, resulting in the exacerbation of ethnic, religious and identity-linked ties (Lyons 2004, 43-47). Inconsistent popular support may be explained by individuals’ changing commitment to the rebels, which varies over time with many factors, including: the physical risks the conflict entails; personal ties and allegiances; and the recruiting or coercive tactics the rebels employ. Wood identifies campesinos’ participation, defiance and “pleasure in agency” as “reasons for participation as well as expressions of the new political culture” (2003, 243).

Local people may exploit the opportunity provided by the greater conflict to pursue private, identity-based conflicts not centrally related to the larger government-guerrilla struggle, as Kalyvas argues. Examining how “individual incentives for violence intersect with larger political and organizational processes” (Tarrow 2007, 588) is a key theoretical consideration in considering how civilians and combatants are mutually co-constituted by evolving interests and opportunities in violent processes.

Beyond the structural effects of communication and political mobilization on social and political actors, violence plays an instrumental role in the relationship between guerrillas and the masses. A comparative analysis of Zimbabwe and El Salvador points to rebels’ use of violence against the population as an important intervening variable—a variable that mediates temporally or spatially between independent and dependent variables (George and Bennett 2005, 246-7). Rebel concerns about the vulnerability associated with abandoning armed struggle are attenuated by the movement’s continued use of violence. Like popular support for the rebels, the insurgents’ use of violent tactics varies with the war’s severity and the focus of the rebels’ strategy and across different locations. Violence in this sense should be understood as an instrument and part of a calculated rebel strategy to achieve a goal
(Lyons 2004, 51). Not only is the level of violence an indicator of the rebel-civilian relationship, but rebels’ exercise of violence is an endogenous mechanism that evolves under the influence of changing circumstances of conflict.

Both the FMLN and the Zimbabwean guerrillas employed forced recruitment as part of their military strategies. The FMLN’s numerous human rights violations, widespread use of land mines toward the end of the war; and assassinations of an average of forty civilians per year between 1983 and 1990 point to its targeted use of violence against even its own constituents (McClintock 1998, 59-77). ZANU/ZAPU guerrillas employed coercion and violence against innocent civilians in securing territory and the liberation of delimited areas of the Rhodesian state. The rebels’ use of violence—particularly violent, protracted intra-rebel factional fighting—during and after the war exploited the profound cleavages in Zimbabwean society that were deepened by the conflict and continue to have negative implications for politics in Zimbabwe. The impact of an assured reliance on war veterans in the post-war period (Kriger 2003) on Mugabe’s decision to negotiate and enter politics is an understudied element of the Zimbabwean transition.

How can the political system be changed to construct conditions amenable to rebel accession to politics?

Through the mutual co-constitution of agents and structures in civil war and efforts to negotiate an end to violence, alternatives and concessions are constructed on the battlefield and at the bargaining table. The interaction among warring actors who bring their ideas and interests to peace talks and external mediators who bring some normative conception of the means through which peace is achieved constitutes an evolving, shifting
target—as malleable interests and minimal commitments evolve, vulnerabilities increase and complete disarmament and political reform begin to appear daunting realities. Each party’s conception of defending its own stake is formed through their perceptions of the other’s interests and intentions. Combatants make their willingness to sacrifice lives for their causes clear through years of violent conflict; as they negotiate a settlement, their interests and identities are continually shaped by the social interactions of a new battlefield. This arena may allow for the possibility of institutional or electoral changes to the political system to secure an agreement on power-sharing or elections.

Empirical evidence illustrates that the anticipation of relative gains won through negotiation and entry into political struggle influences actors’ decisions to revise their interests and disarm. If a rebel group negotiates an opportunity to secure a meaningful stake in government through electoral competition—often generated through alterations to the electoral system or the apportionment of legislative seats, or a guaranteed role in rewriting a constitution—it is likely to agree to enter the political ring, thereby changing the “rules of the game” and increasing its leverage indefinitely (Shugart 1992).

The impact of the electoral system on rebels’ decisions to enter politics varies with the size and nature of the rebel group, its stated political objectives and the degree to which the preservation of the institutional status quo is in the interest of the régime. The FMLN sought changes to the electoral system throughout the 1980s; its goal was increased political inclusiveness and a universal right to representation in El Salvador. Early in the war when the rebels were focused on military strategy, FMLN leaders’ specific ideas about the group’s electoral prospects were less important than efforts to revolutionize the political system overall. Their focus changed when they realized that working for change within the
parameters of the existing system provided more strategic benefits—for example, international legitimacy—than continuing the conflict. In addition, some concessions from the government through negotiations seemed increasingly likely. The number of parliamentary seats increased from 60 to 84 and electoral policies were liberalized as a result of the peace agreement. The overall benefits perceived by the rebel movement of its reconstitution as a legal, political actor in an internationally recognized, newly structured electoral system outweighed the risks of adherence to wringing greater concessions from the régime on electoral reform. The rebels’ anticipation of their legitimate role in the democratic consolidation of El Salvador was equally important in the strategic transition from violence to contentious politics.

In Rhodesia in 1979, a crucial component to induce Mugabe and the rebels to participate fully in negotiations was allowing the guerrillas to benefit at the table from their distinct advantage over the régime on the battlefield. For Mugabe, the idea of the black majority gaining political power—particularly ZANU(PF)—was more important than the mechanisms of the electoral system through which “national liberation” occurred. From an institutionalist perspective, another electoral arrangement would have been more favorable to ZANU(PF) given its large size. Moreover, before the talks began at Lancaster House, Muzorewa and Nkomo each believed that his electoral victory was imminent—convictions in part engineered by the British. The rebels prioritized the legitimating potential of free and fair elections—an international norm of electoral democracy—over the benefits of specific electoral systems.

While rationalist calculations about the opportunities and limitations of possible institutional reforms may define actors’ conceptions of their political opportunities, they
ultimately make decisions in a space constituted by ideational structures—their beliefs about their electoral prospects and popular support and their knowledge about the workings of the system. The roles adopted by agents—rebel and government parties, mediators and observers—in interactions at the negotiating table reinforce and reshape normative and ideational structures. If they reach an agreement, actors’ willingness to adhere to its provisions depend on the trust they have in institutions, the other parties and voters; agents’ identities and interests continue shaping their behavior.

The potential to institute political reform shapes the environment in which actors engage, and the negotiating table becomes a space in which discussion about power-sharing and elections become possible. The system’s institutional character—for example whether a particular electoral system lends itself to participation by small or “outsider” parties—may impact the rebel group’s and regime’s considerations about entering politics. Institutional reforms may provide certain guarantees that the other side will not renege on its commitments. Through the mechanism of imagination (Reus-Smit 1996, 218-9), normative and ideational structures mold what actors see as possible within a given political system.
Table 3. Impacts of Various Factors on Rebels’ Decisions to Consider Politics over Continued War: A Typology of Interactive Perceptions and Preferences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rebel movement</th>
<th>International Influence</th>
<th>Popular support</th>
<th>Electoral System Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZANU/ZAPU, Zimbabwe</td>
<td>VERY STRONG: British mediation in decolonization context; Regional actors (Mozambican, Zambian governments) demanding an end to the Zimbabwean civil war coerced ZANU/ZAPU leaders to negotiate at Lancaster House</td>
<td>MODERATELY HIGH: Black majority supported national liberation movement; civilian backing became divided between 2 rebel factions, shaping post-war political system. <strong>Rebels used VIOLENCE and intimidation to ensure active civilian backing.</strong></td>
<td>LESS IMPORTANT: Open-list proportional representation (PR) system less important to rebels than anticipated shift from white minority rule to black majority rule; system allowed parliamentary seat guarantees to be made to white régime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMLN, El Salvador</td>
<td>VERY STRONG: United Nations as mediator during peace process legitimized rebels as political actors; Regional actors (Cuba, Nicaragua) provided critical material &amp; ideological support to rebels; End of Cold War spurred adjustment of rebels’ Marxist-Leninist ideology</td>
<td>HIGH: level and kinds of popular support varied over time throughout war; <strong>Moderate VIOLENCE was employed by rebels against civilians</strong></td>
<td>IMPORTANT: Open-list PR permitted the anticipated participation of a small, “outsider” party like the FMLN; Successful effort to increase number of legislative seats from 60 to 84 (and overall political reform) contributed to rebels’ decision to negotiate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Intervening variable appears in BOLD*
Constructivism, civil conflict and rebellion-into-politics

As an approach to social analysis, constructivism emphasizes the role of human consciousness in social life. The ideational factors that shape human interaction are most importantly, widely shared beliefs, which are not reducible to individuals (Finnemore et al, 2001, 391). These “intersubjective” beliefs construct the interests of social actors. The interactions of agents–social actors–in political fora defined by peace, conflict, coexistence or low-level incompatibility–engender structures–ideas, culture, beliefs–that condition the interests and identities of the actors. The constructivist framework, then, affords an opportunity to understand a particular mode of agential interaction and change–transition from intrastate conflict. The study of civil war–gaining forceful momentum in line with its metastasis around the world–requires an understanding of the varied motivations of states and non-state actors, whose grievances, interests, objectives and identities are partially determined by their relationships to one another and to the environment in which they interact.

Traditionally applied in political science to theoretical examinations of international society and relations among states, elements of the constructivist approach may be applied fruitfully to transitions from civil conflict. First, the identity of belligerents is transformed by their changing interests. For a non-state actor or the regime, perceptions of the potential advantages of giving up violent conflict–for instance, cutting military losses or acquiring assured political power through elections–shape its interests. The progression of the conflict has resulted in war weariness or improved relations with the voting public, and the regime’s or rebels’ preferences reflect these changed realities. Their interests become solidified as objectives at the bargaining table and shape the responses of the other party. In the process,
the identities of both parties to the conflict change; if they reach a settlement, they are no longer “enemies” but pledge to coexist in shared domestic political space. If a rebel group transforms into a party, it becomes a legitimate political actor with a reconstituted mandate and identity.

Second, as a core assumption of constructivism, co-constitution of agents and structures in intrastate conflict plays out in civil conflicts and transitional periods in ways other than identity formation. Through interactions in the battles for ‘hearts and minds’ of civilians in cities and rural villages and for the changeable regional and international sources of support that combatants acquire, ideas drive agents, who shape beliefs and values through iterative practices and roles. The practices they carry out maintain and transform these structures (Reus-Smit, 1996, 218). For instance, the behavior of rebel and government parties in response to the actions of “spoilers”—different types of intransigent local actors who seek to disrupt or overturn peace processes through violent and non-violent means—or to the presence and behavior of an international mediator in talks between warring parties sustain the norms and ideas behind spoiler activity and the mediator’s interventions.

Third, international norms have constraining and enabling effects on actors’ decisions to come to the table and on the outcomes of negotiation. The interest of the United Nations in constructing a successful peace-building model in Central American civil conflicts, particularly Guatemala—evident in its intricate, sustained involvement in negotiations and long-term verification role—coalesced with the government’s agenda of importing capitalism and gaining international market access and legitimacy. In the wake of disastrous failures in Rwanda and Somalia, the U.N. set out to succeed in constructing and monitoring peace in El Salvador and Guatemala. The Guatemalan government’s intentions
to avoid genuine engagement, “wait out the peace” and defeat the guerrilla coalition were buoyed by the long-term U.N. presence. Domestic agents in conflict transitions are shaped by the normative and ideational pressures and conditions of external involvement.

Finally, while domestic-level political and social dynamics are the heart of civil wars, every intrastate conflict has international dimensions—whether manifest through the influence of international norms or external actors’ direct or indirect investment. Comparative politics and research methods may have implications for analyzing civil wars, as a constructivist analysis elicits. As Gourevitch’s seminal “second image reversed” illustrates, understanding the influence of international elements on domestic conditions is essential to theory-building in international relations and comparative politics.

Civil war is a complex plane of interaction with spatial and temporal characteristics. Actors’ identities and interests change as they perceive the conflict, their advantages, shortcomings and “the enemy” differently over time. These ideational structures are not pre-formed and cannot be taken for granted. Rebel groups, secessionist movements and ethnic insurgencies initiate conflict with the state for a variety of reasons that have much to do with the social, political and economic milieu which they inhabit and share. As conflict progresses, its dynamics shape the state response and rebel counter-reactions, and beliefs about what is possible and desirable change. The loci of violence in conflict—physical and psychological—develop and evolve as a result of interactions among participants in the conflict, whether civilians, insurgents or state security forces—at local, national and abstract levels. In this way, the decision of a rebel group to disarm and attempt to settle differences in the political sphere can be usefully examined through a constructivist lens.
Such a theoretical approach can simultaneously take into account the level of abstraction of conflict and its “on-the-ground” distribution of capabilities. The latter, material forces—in the form of actors’ military strength, economic resources and international support, for example—mold the dimensions of conflict, which form part of the social structure in which combatants and parties to negotiations interact. As Wendt points out, though “material conditions by themselves explain relatively little,” it is important to note that the ideational aspect of structure “supervenes on this material base” (Wendt 1999, 189). He concludes that a social system ultimately has a single structure, and understanding it requires taking both ideational and material elements into account (190).

**Violence and politics in civil war and implications for transitions**

Motivations are a complex factor in civil wars. As Kalyvas argues, actors cannot be treated as unitary. Multiple, sometimes contradictory allegiances feed conflict participants’ interests and actions. Moreover, motivations at local, “mass” levels often differ from the reasons for fighting at the central, “elite” level (Kalyvas 2003). This critical discrepancy and its manifestations at local levels—for example, a violent feud over land between two peasant communities that side with and harbor guerrilla forces, one of which later turns against the rebels, breeding local violence anew—suggests that complex motivations sustain cycles of violence that may appear as reflections of the larger government-guerrilla struggle. In this case, which occurred during Peru’s civil conflict, villagers exploited the opportunity that the larger war provided to carry out a private, local conflict—whether over natural resources, ethnicity or access to Sendero Luminoso rebels.
Uncovering peripheral conflicts within wider civil conflicts demands a revised orientation toward understanding civil wars and the opportunities and identities that they generate and perpetuate. Identity labels alone cannot be relied upon to characterize agents—or their motives—in certain types of civil conflict. “Thus, we speak of actors such as Shias, Albanians, or workers following descriptions of civil wars along the ‘modular’ themes of religion, ethnicity or class” (Kalyvas 2003, 481). These loaded designations wrongly imply the “interchangeability” of actors who belong to a particular group—who become violent for a single cause and therefore can be substituted for any other member of their “grievance” group. Drawing theoretical conclusions as a result of these labels is misleading and results in overgeneralization.

Studies of the causes of conflict and civil war termination—two areas on which much of the literature to date has focused—generally do not take into account complex causal mechanisms operating at local levels and the implications of their interactions with the overriding conflict environment. Not only are actors not unitary, they may reconstruct their identities and interests as opportunities in civil conflict permit. Campbell’s formulation of deconstruction as it relates to understanding civil war aims to illustrate how that which claims not to be produced has been produced. In his view, violence renders as natural that which is actually constructed; these imagined divisions in society have clear consequences for identity. The “performative constitution of identity” (Campbell 1998, 24) in turn embodies and generates conflict.

Campbell’s argument is that focusing on the political consequences of particular “representations”—rather than on causality—is essential to an ethical understanding of the social world. An emphasis on particularity, in contrast to Hegel’s pursuit of the universal, is
useful to conceptualizing the importance of local forces at work in civil conflict that transcend the primary dichotomy of binary conflict data. In explaining why “local cleavages are neglected and local identities inferred from the larger conflict, Kalyvas points to “an epistemic preference for the universal over the particular” (2003, 480). A new research agenda for understanding civil wars must take into account the particularities of micro-level actions, conflicts and identities and their relationship to wider incompatibilities.

Not all violence in civil wars is “political” (Kalyvas 2003, 476). Violence can be employed as an instrument of constructing identity further, and its use hardens representations of divisive lines of ethnic and religious identity and sovereignty. Violence becomes history, image, memory, and self-interested individuals draw on embedded ideas and traditions to perpetuate conflict. This is evident in the Israel-Palestinian conflict and in Afghanistan. Violence in this sense is inherent in identity formation.

The varied, constructed identities formed during civil conflict are those that actors bring to the negotiation table in transitions to politics. As has been argued, these structures are subject to change through interaction. Studies of exits from violent internal conflict and entries into politics must take into account the varied identities and interests of actors—whether rebel leaders, governments or civilians—and their impact on exacerbating conflict and producing it anew.
Implications for theorizing rebellion-into-politics and other transitions from conflict

Civil War Analysis–Grasping for a False Dichotomy

Outside of rationalist and constructivist considerations of the phenomenon, developing a theory of violent conflict remains difficult, not least because the nature of conflict is independent of the reasons for it (Addison 2002, 31). The inherent unpredictability of conflict eludes explanation or prediction. The instrumental role played by individual will in violent politics and conflict—“reflexivity” in the language of international relations theory—makes the tasks of defining and quantifying violence and building a model of violent conflict tenuous.

As innumerable scholars have pointed out, the majority of wars are now civil wars. With the decline of “great power” wars, whether partially attributable to “democratic peace” or other shared norms, international conflicts may play out on domestic battlefields—both superimposed and interwoven into local, violent dynamics and economic, ethnic and religious divisions. Contentious politics displays patterns of alliances, identity formation and shifts, and reconstitution of domestic and international actors. Kalyvas gives voice to what may seem obvious: civil wars are “processes that provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the greater conflict, particularly through violence” (2003, 479). Civil conflicts entail a combination of identities, actions and motivations (political and private, individual and collective); violence is never only spurred by economic or political considerations. Macro-level, quantitative studies of internal wars, while they have identified trends and transnational correlations among conflicts, employ insufficient measurements and
leave behind significant theoretical gaps. These analyses have limited the questions scholars have asked about civil war (Weinstein 2006, 366).

In-depth qualitative research—what Kalyvas terms systematized analysis of “fine-grained data”—and innovative theoretical approaches are needed to highlight causal processes and intervening mechanisms in civil conflicts. “Analytical and empirical disaggregation” of local-level dynamics and violence are imperative to differentiating cause, constitution and structural effects in internal war. The source of civil wars’ ambiguity and complexity is the interaction between center and periphery. (2003, 476, emphasis added). As methodological approaches evolve to examine ontological complexity, a greater number of political scientists will take on the task of theorizing change in civil war.

A constructivist approach to the analysis of civil wars may spur scholars to use comparative research tools (Finnemore 2001, 404-5). These methods emphasize qualitative, case study based analysis, interpretive methods and fieldwork. Understanding interactions rather than quantities is critical to studying the dynamic of violence in civil wars—the “mechanisms and processes that drive contention” (Tarrow 2007, 596). Qualitative methods may help identify key actors and alliances and determine which competing mechanisms are most salient. Employing within-case analysis, process-tracing and narrative may help reorient explanations of internal conflict from episodes to mechanisms and processes (McAdam et al, 2001, 309-10). “Explanation consists of identifying crucial mechanisms and their combinations into transforming processes” (310). Large-n quantitative analyses of civil wars do not permit the intricate methods that this sort of explanation demands.
Approximating the ideational and normative dynamics of civil war transitions and their complex agents may require techniques that comparative scholars recommend. The study of actors’ decision-making in transitions from violent conflict suggests a redirected approach to deconstructing civil war and the processes that mitigate, terminate and resolve these forms of conflict. A systematic, empirical approach to civil wars through specification of causal mechanisms will improve theoretical analyses—and perhaps the willingness of scholars to tackle these types of conflicts.

When today’s social science has become intellectual history, one question will certainly be asked about it: why did social science, which has produced so many studies of so many subjects, produce so few on violent political disorder—internal war?... By any common-sense reckoning the contemporary literature should be brimming over with such studies. (Eckstein quoted in O’Leary et al, 2007, 1)

Roland Paris argued in 2001 that the study of peace operations, traditionally guided by a search for policy-relevant “lessons learned” and the pursuit of micro-theory, is fundamentally missing a crucial element: macro-theory (2001, 30-31). Establishing a relationship between peace operations and the central theoretical debates of international relations would have promising benefits for students of both. Similarly, a dialogue among comparative and IR scholars and with other social science disciplines would prove fruitful to the next step in the study of violence and change in civil wars. Examining conflict dynamics through a constructivist lens is one proposed means to elicit a conceptualization of the structural effects of norms and identities in internal conflict and their implications for understanding micro- and macro-level processes. The linkages between studies of transitions from civil war and theoretical controversies in international relations are clear and many—including the role of international norms, state sovereignty, and the interaction between
domestic and international politics. Constructing a process-centered methodological approach to studying conflict that transcends disciplines may provide international relations theory with the invigoration and relevance it desperately needs.
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