Participation in violent politics during Peru’s internal armed conflict: Ayacucho and Puno in comparative historical perspective

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Does the presence of an armed actor change the nature of political participation? Democratic states that experience internal conflict continue to hold elections and debates over policy, as well as effect peaceful transfers of power among successive governments. A reified distinction between “violence” and “politics” in the study of political violence and civil war has prevented scholars from contextualizing war politically, as a process that forms part of a forum for debate and a range of participatory choices, and that emerges from extant sources of contention. How does the existence and operation of an armed leftist actor change the range and risk of opportunities for political expression? What actors and forms of participation are altered with changes in the array of expressive opportunities? Is violence politically expressive?

These questions are interrelated, and critical to understanding how citizens in democratic states express their grievances and interests. They also impel us as scholars to question the role of violence in the practice of democratic politics. Under what conditions do people accept violence as an “expressive” political option? How do political parties and movements understand their mandates to represent, organize, and mobilize civilians, and what role do bombs and firearms play in these processes? To observe how the presence of an armed actor alters the nature and degree of people’s participation in democratic politics, we may usefully look to Peru, a country in which a return to democracy after a military dictatorship brought with it the outbreak of a violent war launched by the Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) insurgency in 1980.

One approach to addressing the question of political participation during war—a question on which the study of civil conflict has not yet focused—involves studying social relations between rebels and civilians. If we trace the connections between participation in “status quo”

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2 Civil wars and insurgencies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Nigeria, India, and Sri Lanka constitute a few examples.
politics and support for violent insurgents, we may better understand how rebel movements’ presence, operations, and ideological discourse shape the range of choices that ordinary people face in the context of civil conflict.

Practices of political participation in states experiencing conflict shape the kinds of relations that develop among rebels and civilians. The government has a clear role in combating rebel violence in the name of a particular cause, and the state undertakes counterinsurgency efforts through military, political, and social means. The political opposition plays a central role in the process of catalyzing ordinary people’s participation in politics and competing or coordinating with violent rebels for civilians’ active support and mobilization. The modes of integration through which opposition parties and social organizations collaborate—for instance, through local associations and federations, bodies that have long histories of channeling demands in particular ways—help explain variation in relations among rebels and citizens. These landscapes and processes, in turn, emerge from long-standing historical conflicts, political struggles, and alliances among social and political organizations.

In Peru, land reform and democratic opportunities expanded in the years prior to the emergence of insurgency in 1980, but the Shining Path rebels (officially the Partido Comunista Peruano-Sendero Luminoso—PCP-SL) targeted precisely this reformism—which they labeled fatally as “reactionary”—of the military regime and later of democratically elected legislators. Both the content of Sendero Luminoso’s ideology—in particular, its commitment to destruction of the existing political system through armed means—and its methods of generating support, which ignored or deliberately undermined extant social movements, resulted in its employing brutal violence against civilians.

During the 1970s prior to the national emergence of the Sendero Luminoso movement, civilian democracy was restored after a transition from a reformist military regime. In the decade following the completion of comprehensive land reform and a return to democracy, the insurgency expanded from 250-500 revolutionaries to 15,000 active combatants and hundreds of

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4 The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission indicates that the PCP-Sendero Luminoso was the principal perpetrator of crimes and human rights violations, as indicated by the numbers of dead and disappeared Peruvians. Sendero Luminoso was responsible for the deaths of 54 percent of victims reported to the Commission, which collected 17,000 voluntary interviews. See “Informe Final,” Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003.
thousands of civilian supporters. According to some analysts, its supporters tended not to participate electorally, and rebels sabotaged existing political opportunities, literally and symbolically—by burning ballot boxes, assassinating local government officials, and encouraging abstention from voting. Sendero Luminoso rejected ties with leftist political forces—labor unions, parties, and civil society associations—and targeted state officials and elected politicians—killing 153 mayors in one year at a high point. The extent of violence and intimidation was so severe that 123 out of 435 districts had no registered candidates for local elections in one year of the insurgency.

In this paper, I examine the nature of political participation in Peru prior to and during its internal armed conflict. Participation is defined in terms of its range of articulation—the extent to which individuals and groups are organized, cohesive, and expressive. I argue that it is not necessarily how much people participate in politics—but how they do—that helps explain the nature of social and political relations between rebels and civilians. Attention to historical forms of mobilization in a given context – and their continuity and disjuncture with modes of participation observed during the war – has ontological implications for how we study violence and politics; these overlapping practices are critical to our understanding of participatory processes in democratic states. I suggest we adopt an ontology of violence and politics that facilitates studying citizens’ participation in violent acts as integrated or disjointed components of political and social practices.

I argue that strongly articulated participation of peasants and civil society in one region of southern Peru ultimately prevented Sendero rebels from co-opting social struggles and gaining support. In Ayacucho, weak articulation of peasant interests and forms of political mobilization in the decades leading up to the outbreak of Sendero Luminoso’s violent guerra popular resulted in the rebels’ ability to penetrate social networks and wage a political struggle for minds and blood. Intensified violence against civilians occurred there in the mid-to-late 1980s, when peasant communities began turning against rebels’ oppressive rule.

What, in turn, does people’s support for violent, anti-state insurgents tell us about their participation in politics? By examining the historical patterns and interconnected processes of

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5 Mason 2004.
7 “Internal armed conflict” is a term of fragile consensus in contemporary Peru, where Shining Path rebels are remembered by many people as “terrorists” and where there is little agreement on how to remember the 1980s. 8 del Pino, 1998.
mobilization and contestation we are able to understand better what active support for rebels signifies, whether it constitutes, among other possibilities, the perception of a real alternative or a product of coercive violence on the part of insurgents—or perhaps both. The empirical study of civilian support for insurgents faces significant challenges. First, the difficulty of measuring and explaining civilian support derives in part from what Kalyvas calls “its unobservable quality.”

Neither the attitudinal nor the behavioral dimension of civilian support is a definitive indicator. Reasons for a civilian’s decision to act in support of rebels may be economic, dependent on social and family networks, or respond to violent pressures from insurgents. Second, support for rebels is endogenous to the dynamics of the conflict; for instance, an increase in violence in a given area may be an indicator of growing local support for rebels, permitting them a greater staging ground for attacks—or it may suggest that targeted attacks against state agents or infrastructure constitute an attempt to demonstrate strength and engender a greater level of support from residents. I understand that while the support of a significant proportion of the population, regardless of motives, is necessary to launch an insurgency and eventually win, the type and level of support changes over time, and civilians’ preferences are not stable. Individuals’ commitments may stem from “varying combinations of persuasion and coercion.”

Defining a single measure of civilian support for rebels may not be possible; measures vary according to the conflict, the social and geographic context, and other dynamics, rendering systematic comparison difficult. Given the difficulties of quantifying people’s support for rebels, I rely on studies of the strategies, presence, and operations of Sendero Luminoso to determine the kind and degree of support for the cadres in localities as it changed over time. I analyze accounts of individual leaders and members of political organizations as they emerge in original interviews and examine archival records that document citizens’ grievances, modes of organization, and resultant conflicts and compromises. Immersion into the lived and documented experiences of participants facilitates an empirical mapping of participation in politics as war rages in the mountains, the halls of the universities, and the streets. Whether, how, and why these forms of participation converge with the ways in which people support Sendero Luminoso is at the heart of the study.

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In this paper I argue that in the years prior to and during the civil conflict, articulated participation in politics significantly hindered the advances of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho. There, campesino (peasant) participation in political organizations was weakly articulated, and Sendero Luminoso generated significant support among peasants, particularly in the first several years of the war. On the other hand, highly articulated participation and integration among political movements in Puno coincided with Sendero’s ultimate inability to secure lasting social roots and support there. I support this claim by analyzing the history of political participation and organization in these two regions before and during the country’s internal conflict (1980-1992). By analyzing these contrasting dynamics, however, I do not suggest that politics – in the form of organized resistance or mobilized support for authority - did not exist in Ayacucho before the formation of Sendero Luminoso and its arrival in the region. Indeed, politics permeated rural peasant life over the course of the nineteenth century, shaping people’s interests, decisions, and affiliations with movements and parties. It is not the absence of political experience that set Ayacuchanos apart from other Peruvians and facilitated their vulnerability to recruitment by rebels, but rather a failure of existing social and political forces – existing parties, new leftist forces, and the Church - to comprehend and catalyze people’s clamors for improved economic and social opportunities and connectedness. It is important to note that while Sendero built a strong operation in the early 1980s in many parts of the region, wide variation existed in the levels and nature of support for Sendero rebels in different parts of Ayacucho. In Puno, peasant activists allied with militant leftists and Church patrons in an effort to realize their agenda of meaningful land reform and representation, generating “a political culture of multiple alliances and coalitions” by exploiting the ways in which their commitment to communal forms of political organization intersected with the agendas of external actors.

Ayacucho is a remote, mostly rural department of the southern-central sierra of Peru, where small-scale farming and raising livestock characterized the economy in the 1980s. The region’s geographical “rinconamiento”—its “cornered” interior, Andean position—disadvantages it in terms of economic and social connectedness. Most Ayacuchanos are Quechua-speaking; rebels’ efforts during the war focused on gaining recruits and sustenance from these indigenous agricultural communities.

12 Heilman 2010.
Puno, in the south, is Peru’s highest department. Situated around the shores of Lake Titicaca, the region shares a border with Bolivia. It is a center for mining, livestock, and agriculture, and leads the country in production of quinoa, potatoes, and wool. Aymara culture and language is prevalent in southern areas of the region, while Quechua speakers populate the northern provinces of Puno, including those of the far-flung Amazon jungle.

Ayacucho experienced the worst of the conflict’s violence, at the hands of both Sendero Luminoso and state security forces. (See Figure 1, page 36). During the period from 1980 to 2000, 10,498 civilians were reported dead or disappeared in just five provinces—Cangallo and Victor Fajardo, Huanta, La Mar, and Huamanga, in addition to the Apurímac river valley. In the bloodiest year of the war, 3,594 Peruvians were killed in the entire south-central region of the country, which includes Ayacucho and parts of Huancavelica and Andahuaylas. Puno, in contrast, experienced brutal violence on a lesser scale: 441 people died or disappeared during the same twenty-year period. In the most affected province, Azángaro, there were 256 deaths. The most violent years in Puno were the second half of the 1980s when extensive political mobilization with regard to land occurred in the region. In Ayacucho, the initial years of the conflict were the most violent, with the bloodiest year being 1984. Ensuing years were characterized by resistance to Sendero Luminoso by a number of communities in Ayacucho. We can comprehend the intensity of conflict in each region in broad terms—without focusing myopically on specific estimated numbers of deaths or supporters, but rather understanding where the rebels achieved support—knowing that this backing shifts over time and the forms it takes vary in different localities.

Connections between support for insurgency and political participation

In areas affected by insurgency, citizens’ vibrant political participation may defy our theoretical expectations about why, in part, ordinary people support rebels. Why people participate strongly and engage with status quo politics in areas where insurgents rely heavily on support from local residents requires further research. Our assumptions about the exclusion of civilians from political rights and opportunities are based on grievance-centered explanations of mobilization, but they do not comprehend the sustained practice of politics and violence in

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democratic states. Theories of individual participation in rebellion that draw on economic and social deprivation\textsuperscript{14} and exclusion from political processes suggest that a state’s efforts to engender greater political participation of excluded civilian groups would reduce opportunities for the success of a violent, anti-state movement that claims to represent them.\textsuperscript{15}

Civilians’ provision of support to rebels is, in fact, a kind of political participation. The ontological separation of ordinary people’s participation in politics and their backing for rebels constitutes an artificial dichotomy because an individual’s or group’s decision to support an insurgency—or not to support it—is critically linked to the opportunities afforded by existing institutions, alternatives for expression of political interests, and the degree of coercion that the group employs. In this sense, I differ from Kalyvas’ strict differentiation between war and peace. He dismisses the importance of the study of conflict not centered on violence as unimportant for the study of civil wars.\textsuperscript{16} But this conceptualization reifies the distinction between “peaceful” contentious politics and wartime, violence-ridden contention; my claim is that both forms of conflict matter, as they both simultaneously draw on extant social and political networks as drivers of outcomes like civilian support, rebel control, and selective violence. Violence and politics overlap, and our ontology should reflect violence not as a social aberration but or institutional failure, but as the murky realities that we observe in both democratic and non-democratic contexts. This is where a focus on civilians as mobilizers and mobilized in the context of insurgency helps illuminate social networks as transformers of political struggle and authority. Civilians and networks are fluid elements of processes of contestation and conflict.

Analysis of electoral data on turnout and parties’ vote shares in Peru reveals some patterns over time—for instance, the gradual advances that the political Left made in the mid-1980s in mobilizing workers and peasants in rural areas, but focusing exclusively on electoral results obscures the processes of organization and participation that voting and other forms of citizen engagement—protests, strikes, involvement in land takeovers, and formation of local, anti-rebel committees (\textit{rondas campesinas})—reflect. In the 1960s and 1970s as political groups sought to mobilize in the face of a military regime, a range of factionalized leftist parties who

\textsuperscript{14} James Davies (1962) identified an individual psychological mechanism—the frustration with a gap between achievement and expectations—as a condition for participation in rebellion. Ted Robert Gurr (1970) argues broadly that a gap between expectations and capabilities generates relative deprivation and the potential to rebel violently.


\textsuperscript{16} Kalyvas 2006, 22; See also Tarrow 2007, 592.
tasked themselves with constructing a socialist political system were confronted with a unique and surprising challenge: a military government who saw its self-appointed mandate as enacting massive social reforms. The resulting processes of policy evaluation, social mobilization, and political party construction form the basis of activity for the Left during these years, setting the stage for political contestation during the internal armed conflict that dominated and bloodied the 1980s in Peru.

Sendero Luminoso’s leadership criticized the 1970s military regimes of Velasco and Morales Bermúdez for their own brand of bourgeois failure, which came in the form of the 1969 agrarian reform. The rebels were forced to adjust to the structural changes that Velasco’s land reform effected—despite its shortcomings in implementation and management—in particular, the disappearance of powerful landowners from the Andean interior of the country. The insurgents, however, underestimated or ignored these shifts and the implications they had for the rising middle classes, considering the return of the democratic government in 1980 to represent “fascist continuity.”17

How did the presence of Sendero Luminoso—officially a Peruvian Communist party—change the nature of participation? The rebels directly and explicitly and violently targeted democratic politics—and the opportunities to participate that it offers citizens. According to the movement’s clandestine leader Abimael Guzmán, the culmination of the proletariat’s armed struggle to eliminate “the old reactionary State” would be the birth of a “Nueva Democracia.” The new democracy of Sendero Luminoso would,

under the dictatorship of the working class, directed by its political vanguard, resolve the historic demands of the most oppressed, principally those of the peasantry, submerged in a merciless, semi-feudal exploitation.18

In practice, Sendero Luminoso physically attacked democratic actors, including elected officials and grassroots organizations like Church-run rural training institutes. It announced the launch of its violent struggle in Chuschi, a small district of central Ayacucho in May 1980, burning voting rolls and ballot boxes on the eve of the first presidential election in 17 years. For the Marxist-

17 Favre 1984, 27.
Leninist-Maoist ideologues, in Peruvian society, contesting elections meant “leaving to the people the election of their oppressors.”

Political participation as articulation of voice and organization

I suggest that the nature of participation—the kinds and extent of the connections among political actors that express and organize for a cause and set of interests—is central to our understanding of politics in war. To what extent participation is articulated—which implies coordinated, communicative, and connected action among political groups—influences the ways in which opposition parties, civil society, the state, and the insurgency interact. In employing the term, I intend for articulated to signify both “articulate”, being able to speak effectively for—in this case, represent—a cause and a group, and “articulated” to imply a sense of being “jointed.” In combination, these two components—political expression and integration—define articulation.

In this study, I assess the level of articulation through a qualitative approximation of efforts by political actors in Peruvian society to mobilize in the context of violent insurgency. It is not necessarily the amount of participation in existing institutions and elections, but rather how people’s interests are expressed and organized through political actors and how these forms integrate with other bodies and structures of organization—for instance, how multiple political parties, or a party and a regional movement join forces to mobilize support for reform. This articulation is reflected not only in voters’ participation in elections, but in people’s engagement with reform movements and mobilization for access to land and education.

In Peru during the civil conflict, electoral participation was low in areas heavily affected by rebel violence. In the department (region) of Ayacucho, participation was frequently quite low. Participation achieved higher levels in Puno, but its inconsistency points to the difficulty of

19 Favre 27.
20 Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “articulate” as “jointed”, or “consisting of segments united by joints”. In this definition, we understand “joint” (“a location at which two or more things or parts are joined”) to imply “node”—a crux or pivot at which groups or actors are critically joined, and which allows them to move or operate together as part of a single frame.
21 In elaborating the concept of articulation, I seek to emphasize a range rather than a dichotomy of articulation. This descriptive range is intended to capture both the quality of expression and integration of political actors.
22 Voting in elections is obligatory by law for all Peruvians aged 21 and over; compulsory voting was made law in 1931 for all literate men over the age of 21, and in 1955 for women. See Tuesta-Soldevilla, 2005, 450.
making claims based solely on electoral turnout and parties’ vote shares. To gain an understanding of participation requires that we look beyond electoral turnout, to examine systematically the links between historical forms of social mobilization, local conflict, and alliance patterns.

Wood argues that the strategies of armed actors and their distinct patterns of violence shape social processes to varying degrees, fueling some ongoing processes and setting others in motion. Processes of mobilization and recruitment and the extent to which local authorities are militarized, gender roles transformed, and economies fragmented vary with patterns of violence in civil wars. The existence and operation of an armed actor in a democratic state emerge from the political authority structures and social networks that define everyday life, and which shape the effect that a rebel movement may have on citizens’ options for participation and mobilization. I suggest that we must understand these processes in order to comprehend war in democracies, and more broadly the links between practices of politics and those of violence.

Following a critical review of the literature on democracy, violence, and war, I outline the contours of electoral participation in Peru and other kinds of participation that characterized political life in Ayacucho and Puno during the decades leading to the war and during the conflict, and their effects on support for Sendero Luminoso. I conclude by emphasizing the ontological and theoretical implications of studying support for rebels and participation in politics.

**Participation in politics during war: what research shows and what we are missing**

The study of participation in politics during civil conflict—and its connection to violence—appears virtually non-existent in the literature. More broadly, research seems to suggest that democratic states are less likely to experience armed conflict than anocracies, but at the same time they are more vulnerable to terrorist activities. The focus on terrorist groups and activities obscures the intrinsic competitive and representative processes at work in democratic states facing civil wars. Scholars who have examined the risk of civil war for certain kinds of regimes find that democratic institutions reduce the risk of war.

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26 Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010.
wars ending between 1946 and 1996 suggests that greater access to political participation, in combination with higher quality of life, has a significant negative effect on the likelihood of renewed civil conflict.²⁷

Other studies take up the complicated connections between the practices of participation and violence. Blattman explores the implications of individual participation as a combatant for post-conflict political participation, through a study of former fighters in Uganda.²⁸ Abduction into a rebel group leads young Ugandans to vote more than their peers and become leaders in their communities following the conflict, which Blattman argues is mainly a product of having witnessed considerable violence. Chenoweth argues that competition among terrorist groups for limited political influence, in addition to competition with the regime in power, helps explain why terrorist activity is more prevalent in democratic states.²⁹ Hultman finds that the electoral accountability of democracies and their relative openness facilitates rebel attacks on civilians in an internal armed conflict.³⁰ Other studies examine the severity of conflict as related to political system: that a regime is democratic is correlated with fewer deaths resulting from civil war violence.³¹

The emphasis of existing research on predicting aspects of war suggests that our study would benefit from a holistic examination of patterns of alliance and competition among political groups—not only why violence occurs in certain ways in certain regimes or why people join violent movements—but how, through everyday engagement and mobilization, the exercise of politics by various actors in a democracy prevents and shapes the use of violence in civil war.³² Staniland stresses the need to theorize “wartime political orders”, various interactions among states and insurgents that construct political authority and control; his ontological emphasis is on bargains and rule, rather than how civilians’ political participation and efforts to represent “the people” relate to the shifting dynamics of an emergent violent context.³³ Building on his call for attention to the politics of violence, I aim to contribute to the development of a social theory of

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²⁸ Blattman 2009.
²⁹ Chenoweth 2010.
³⁰ Hultman 2012.
³¹ Lacina 2006.
³² In emphasizing the problems in using “degree of democracy” as a proxy for state strength and repressive capacity, Gleditsch and Ruggeri (2010) point out that many indicators used in empirical studies of civil war are relatively crude indicators of the underlying concepts and only vaguely related to the theoretical rationale.
³³ Staniland 2012.
war, which acknowledges that the occurrence of war is a function of social changes and political practices and that war is a process that leaves enduring imprints on institutional and political forms.

The nature of wartime political participation in Peru

For a number of reasons, analysis of electoral results in Peru cannot demonstrate fully the different ways that people participated in politics in the period prior to and during the armed conflict. Using evidence from interviews of political party militants and peasant leaders, local archival records, and political party documents, I develop a history of civilian participation in politics and how it relates to mobilization for reform efforts and violent revolutionary processes during the Sendero Luminoso insurgency.

The limits of studying electoral participation during the 1980s

Electoral results and turnout data only indicate so much about participation for several reasons. First, electoral democracy was reinitiated in Peru in 1978, when elections took place for a Constituent Assembly that would rewrite the Constitution. Given the centrality of understanding political engagement in the 1950s-1970s – the decades leading up to the internal conflict - we must examine patterns of mobilization that do not necessarily involve electoral participation. Second, in 1980, some citizens were not equipped with the ability to understand a new process. That year, a number of voters could not read, including a considerable percentage of rural, indigenous residents. Illiterate citizens were legally eligible to vote in Peru for the first time in the country’s history. They encountered complex printed ballots that required them to mark or write their vote. In addition, widespread displacement in the 1980s during the conflict—particularly following the declaration of emergency at the end of 1982—prevented some Peruvians from voting since citizens are permitted to cast their votes only in their hometowns.34

Third, participation in elections is mandated by law in Peru. While this may, according to one reading, enhance the study of participation by ensuring a “representative” sample of all citizens—rather than whatever percentage of Peruvians turn out—it may, in fact, make the decision to go and vote less indicative of an individual’s preferences and more about their

34 Poole and Renique 1991, 184. fn. 59.
interest in complying with the law. On the other hand, due to mandatory voting, variation in rates of abstentionism from elections in the 1980s can reveal much about the demographic and security climate in a given district or province.

During the 1980s in many regions of the country, elected municipal-level officials were assassinated or resigned from their posts. Sendero Luminoso persecuted and at times killed peasant organizers, leftist activists, and other political leaders such as local priests. Drawing conclusions based solely on electoral participation omits the role of individuals, civil society groups, and insurgents in determining and shaping local-level governance and forms of participation. An account of a prominent peasant leader in Puno suggests that indigenous Peruvians in the region refused to accept the leaders that Sendero Luminoso named to replace an individual in a local post—for instance, a mayor, town councilor, judge—who had fled following threats from the rebels or had been assassinated. The leader indicated that villagers would select their own replacement in community deliberations to fill the vacated position; in his opinion, this defiance pointed to the democratic nature of peasant political organization and governance. Even the political choices most menacingly imposed by murderous cadres with guns—and which help define wartime political orders—are subject to particular patterns and instincts of civilian agency.

**Electoral turnout and poll results, 1980-1990**

Some scholars argue that political participation during the 1980s in Peru was vibrant and widespread; grassroots movements were operating—for example, unions and neighborhood associations—and in opinion polls, people expressed support for democracy. McClintock suggests that the persistence of democracy during the 1980s was a product not of the strength of democratic institutions, but of strategic calculations by elites, who anticipated that the costs of returning to authoritarianism were precipitously higher than those of maintaining the status quo. But I argue that a return to democracy meant that people were voting and exercising their rights to engage in reform and protest; the opportunities offered by electoral institutions formed only one aspect of participation in post-dictatorship Peru. Still, it is important to have in mind the broad contours of voting amid violence as we consider participation in all its forms.

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35 Interview with Héctor Cruz. 14 August 2013. Héctor Cruz is a pseudonym, as are the names given to most interviewees in this paper. Pseudonyms are denoted by an asterisk.
How did participation change during the course of the war? In 1978, the military regime initiated the process of handing over authority to a democratic government by holding elections for a Constituent Assembly. This would result in 100 electors—allocated by party vote share—that would write a new constitution to replace the 1933 version. Turnout in these elections was strong throughout the country, including in Ayacucho (80.5%), despite a boycott by PCP-Sendero Luminoso and the refusal to participate by primary leftist parties Red Flag (BR) and Red Fatherland (PR).

Puneños (residents of Puno) came out in force to vote as well, with 85% participating in the first election in more than a decade. In 1980, Fernando Belaúnde Terry—whose tenure as president in the 1960s had been interrupted by a bloodless military coup—won re-election as the Popular Action (AP) party candidate, winning 44.9% of the national vote. Leftist parties were not prepared or mobilized at the national level to contest the election seriously. In Ayacucho, people supported the center-right Belaúnde, who secured 56.3% of the vote there, with APRA achieving second place (17.3%) and a coterie of five left parties, running separately, managing to garner a combined 22% of the vote. Absenteeism in Ayacucho (24.3%) climbed since 1978, and was even higher in some of the poorest provinces.

In Puno, where voters have historically been ardent supporters of the electoral Left, Belaúnde achieved one quarter of the vote, while the leftist parties received about the same (24.9%). In Azángaro, the province of the Puno altiplano (southern high plain) that would be hardest-hit by violence during the conflict, absenteeism was comparatively low at 14.4%.

President Belaúnde called municipal elections immediately, but people did not come out to the polls with as much enthusiasm as they had in national-level elections, as demonstrated by 52.2% absenteeism in Ayacucho region and 24.8% in Puno, strikingly elevated figures. Residents of Victor Fajardo province, one of the poorest and most remote provinces of Ayacucho, provided no votes to the United Left (IU) party in these municipal elections; instead their votes went primarily to AP (66.2%). However, Ayacuchanos’ faith in the Belaúnde government would be shaken over the next few years by its weak and unsuccessful efforts in combating the attacks and threats of Sendero Luminoso. The number of invalid votes (14.6%)

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37 Tuesta-Soldevilla, Fernando. 2007. All electoral results are taken from the political data at Tuesta-Soldevilla’s blog, Politika: blog.pucp.edu.pe/fernandotuesta/data-politica. Accessed 5 August 2013.

38 Tuesta-Soldevilla 2007.
shows that voters were still figuring out how to mark—or purposefully sullying—their ballots; absenteeism overall in Peru reached 30.9% in the municipal elections in 1980.

Three years later, municipal elections brought limited but tangible success for the burgeoning Left, which defeated APRA in key departments like Cusco and Puno; in Ayacucho the IU achieved only 15.6% of the vote. The 1985 presidential and parliamentary elections demonstrated strong support for the center-left APRA party led by Alan Garcia—including in Ayacucho, where in provinces highly affected by violence, including abuses by the armed forces—voters showed that they were not swayed by the Left’s program. In Victor Fajardo province, IU achieved only 25.7% support to APRA’s 56.9%. Nationally, the Left suffered in the 1985 election and failed to fully regain a foothold among voters, as active persecution of leftist leaders and politicians intensified during the Garcia and Alberto Fujimori governments.

In 1990, Fujimori won the presidential election in a second-round upset, achieving more than 62% of the national vote on a populist platform and with a new party. As disastrous economic conditions—primarily astronomical hyperinflation and spreading violence plagued Peruvians, voters punished APRA for its failures, electing a technocrat with little political experience to turn things around. The IU was routed, achieving less than 10% of seats in the Senate, reflecting its fractured leadership. This brief analysis of electoral results suggests that people’s participation in voting after more than a decade of military rule and during the launch of a violent insurgency can directly reveal few salient patterns about the nature of participation and its connection to people’s support for Sendero Luminoso.

**Contestation over ideology and practice within the Left**

To understand the nature of mobilization and participation before and during the civil conflict, we must examine the forms and contexts in which these processes emerged. The debate among the Left on the nature of representation that occurred in Peru from 1960 to 1990 has implications for political participation and citizens’ responses to parties and social movements. On the eve of 1980 elections, after twelve years of a socialist military regime which repressed political dissidents, the Left suffered from internal disagreements about how to wage revolutionary struggle, how to characterize the state and economy (semi-feudal, capitalist, etc.),
and the role of electoral politics in the struggle. In question were the nature of representation and the role of the party in organizing citizens—or speaking as elite leaders on their behalf.

A letter of resignation from Pineda, then a leader of Revolutionary Vanguard (VR), a group of socialist leaders and a party that helped found the United Left (IU) alliance in 1980, demonstrates this tension between the active participation of those whom a political party or movement seeks to empower and their representation by powerful officials.

The notion of representation guarantees the substitution, postponement, and exclusion of the workers from power. It is for power through and for the working class that we fight and not for the power of and for the officials who speak in the name of the proletariat.39

Pineda critiqued VR’s embrace of Maoism, arguing that the movement had lost its socialist goals, and as a result, the working class, the masses, had lost their voice in the political struggle. For Pineda, the party had to determine whether “the party represents the working class, or the working class is politically organized.” The latter path required that the party organization be a creative force capable of developing new solutions to the challenges of the class struggle.

At this time, prior to the outbreak of violent rebellion, Sendero Luminoso was struggling to install a new set of leaders through the masses. As a means of recruitment, the party had promised positions in a future government to young people—many from peasant families, some of whom were the first in their families to attend university—who became guerrilleros.

According to Sendero Luminoso’s ideology and practice, the process of transformation enacted through the armed struggle requires a “god”—a deified leader—and an elite leadership to guide the party’s line and its subsequent actions. But these chosen rebel leaders do not represent the peasantry and working class; Sendero Luminoso’s central committee did not aim to speak on behalf of the indigenous and the poor.

These divergences in ideology—elements which were the subject of debate over decades among Left activists and leaders—demonstrate how leftist groups that were not part of Sendero Luminoso viewed participation differently than those who chose violent rebellion. How ideological differences shaped forms of membership in these distinct political organizations and the ways in which leaders and mid-level cadre constructed social relations with ordinary Peruvians are a critical part of understanding the ways that people participated. The ideological

principles of a political organization shape its everyday experiences and cultivate the development of supporters and the kinds of social relations it encourages between them.\textsuperscript{40}

I examine three aspects of political participation in two regions: Ayacucho and Puno. Varied forms of participation by civilians in each region take shape under the influence of: political parties and peasant federations in the 1970s and 1980s, and relations between these groups; second, the agrarian reform that the military government enacted beginning in 1969; and third, the role of the Catholic Church in influencing the political awareness and mobilization of peasants, particularly in rural areas. I provide evidence from archival records and interviews I conducted with political militants and residents of areas affected by the violence of the conflict.

\textbf{Ayacucho: political parties and \textit{campesino} (peasant) federations in flux}

Political participation in Ayacucho peaked at a crucial moment in the late 1960s, when a region-wide movement for universal access to free education surged, filling the streets with young people, their parents, and their teachers. Through the efforts of swelling peasant federations, teachers’ unions, and student associations, who were fighting for the negation of a law that the Velasco regime had enacted in March 1969, which mandated that families pay tuition for students who had failed courses the previous year. This represented a significant change from a system in which all public education was free.\textsuperscript{41}

In Ayacucho during the 1960s and 1970s, campesino communities in the northern-central provinces formed part of an interwoven social network characterized by very weak articulation to the state as well as to the market. For instance, people in Victor Fajardo and Cangallo provinces, nestled in the valley of the Pampas and Qaracha rivers, were most marginalized, without access to basic services—medical posts, highways, water, electricity. For the residents of these rural areas public education was perceived as critically important, as the way to escape—through their children—decades of poverty and marginalization.\textsuperscript{42}

Political mobilization in Ayacucho changed shape over the years prior to the onset of Sendero Luminoso’s armed actions. During the 1960s and 1970s, Ayacucho residents

\textsuperscript{40} Shah 2013, 495. How ideological abstractions – for example, the production of the future proletariat through the remaking of peasants - specifically influence social relations between rebels and civilians in Peru is the subject of a separate paper.
\textsuperscript{41} Degregori 1990, 51.
experienced opportunities to participate and mobilize for education reform, led by peasant and teachers’ associations and leftist activists. Some of those who were to become the future leaders of Sendero Luminoso and other Left groups, including Guzmán, were professors and activists instrumental in the struggle for education in Huanta in northern Ayacucho and Huamanga, the capital city of the region.

In the early 1960s, the first all-peasant congresses were held in Ayacucho; these movements included peasant leaders, lawyers, students, and trade union members. They aimed to recover lands from powerful local families who had seized them decades before. Later, when in the 1970s, leftist parties made decisions to adopt divergent paths of political action (violent insurgency or electoral politics), the range of opportunities for participation shifted for citizens of Ayacucho. By the 1970s, Maoist parties—primarily Patria Roja (PR, or Red Fatherland) and Partido Comunista Peruano Bandera Roja (PCP-BR)—had fragmented. PR gained hegemonic control of teachers’ unions and formed part of the United Left electoral alliance starting in 1980. PCP-BR, in contrast, was embedded in the peasantry, maintaining control of the national peasant federation, the CCP. However, by 1974, PCP-BR proved incapable of channeling the demands of the peasants and it withdrew its leadership. Other small left parties took over, strengthened the CCP, and later contested elections.43

During the 1960s and 1970s, in the absence of strong political parties, people participated in communal assemblies, primarily by democratic vote, to make decisions regarding local affairs.44 Local authorities—including governors, mayors, and town councilors—were appointed by the national government until the 1970s. These authorities possessed a considerable amount of power, and people in remote towns of Ayacucho were generally excluded from decision-making, which occurred mainly at the level of the central government in faraway Lima.

In 1984 French sociologist Henri Favre wrote that no political party in Peru has achieved—or proposed—a popular framework for mobilization in Ayacucho. The national parties in the early 1980s—Popular Action (AP), the Popular Christian Party (PPC), and the United Left (IU)—“shone for their absence” in the region.45 When in interviews I asked about the presence and activities of parties, peasant leaders and rural residents in Ayacucho usually

43 Degregori 1990, 164.
44 Interview with Ernesto Ortiz.* 26 June 2013.
45 Efforts by the state—for instance, the military regime in the 1970s—fell drastically short, as did political parties’ attempts to generate people’s participation. See Favre 1984, 28.
responded vaguely that they remember AP and APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, founded in 1924)—both of which, at varying moments over the last decades, have achieved a range of center-left, centrist, or more traditional, conservative partisan positions. Percy Otero,* a regional peasant leader from central Ayacucho whom I interviewed mentioned that the parties he recalls—AP, APRA, and the PPC—were quieted when Sendero Luminoso arrived in his town, which was besieged by violent attacks and from which the rebels recruited many young people.46

During the conflict, Sendero Luminoso had weak ties with organized social movements—in particular, with peasants—because in 1970 it had made a strategic decision to withdraw to the University San Cristobal of Huamanga in the capital of Ayacucho, while the other small Left parties decided to “go to the masses.” Sendero Luminoso leaders, at the time integrated as PCP-BR (Red Flag), allied with the Chinese version of Marxism-Communism. From 1964 to 1969 in Ayacucho, its leaders had gained influence in neighborhood associations and teachers’ groups, particularly among students and professors at the University San Cristobal, involved in the struggle for education and indigenous rights. Limitations on political participation during the military regime contributed to the fact that universities—particularly state universities—became centers of “political socialization and indoctrination.”47 Starting in 1966, these Red Flag militants promoted the formation of the People’s Defense Front of Ayacucho, an organization that developed and received significant recognition as a social actor.

The Partido Comunista del Peru-Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL) was born in early 1970 as a splinter group of PCP-BR, and during this time the military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) severely repressed those mobilizing for education. This targeted repression disarticulated the People’s Defense Front. Other social organizations in Ayacucho retreated, failing to consolidate the mobilizing opportunities they had begun building among citizens. In the mid-to-late 1970s, Sendero effectively cut off all ties with social movements in an effort to elaborate and maintain a completely coherent ideological doctrine—an orthodox version of Marxist-Maoist thought that they promulgated among university students, with Guzmán at the helm of the effort—and which privileged the party line above all else. Echoing Stalin, Sendero leaders sought to ensure that the party line “decide everything;” when the party line is laid down

46 Interview with Percy Otero. 21 June 2013.
and is correct, then the cadres decide everything. This elevation of ideological purity and the organization’s centralized, hierarchical structure made social movements per se of no genuine interest to Sendero: Guzmán emphasized that “society is an illusion”, if everything but power—which is instrumented by the party—is an illusion.48

As a result, Sendero Luminoso did not prioritize unions, peasant federations, or community organizations, but instead it privileged the party’s “generated fronts” (organismos generados) that serve as the link between these social organizations and the people. University professors and students played important roles in connecting these social forces. The rebels’ conception of el frente—“the front”—amounts to a political pretext for broader work that includes and serves as a complement to armed struggle. In their ideological framework, this is the political project of the peasants and workers.

The question that concerned and divided Senderista leaders is what kind of “front” ought to accompany the armed actions initiated in 1980—in other words, how can the project of generating social bases be reconciled with the project of violent attacks, which for Senderista leaders formed two complementary aspects of the struggle. Can the front, for Sendero Luminoso, include “other democratic sectors”?50—the middle classes, intellectuals, and the national bourgeoisie? Sendero Luminoso did not promote the idea of “the front” as it is understood by the rest of the Left—as an alliance among classes. Instead, the Senderista ideologues viewed it as the confluence of distinct movements that the party controls—for example, the worker and peasant movement (MOTC), the Peruvian youth movement, and the women’s movement. The front, both as a theoretical concept for Sendero Luminoso and one that shapes the movement’s actions in practice, captures a critical element of the purpose of civilian mobilization—the control of organized groups as part of its political machine—an encompassing device that effects extreme, targeted violence.

Second, the support from ordinary people (the social base) that Sendero Luminoso constructed was in Ayacucho—where, unlike other parts of Peru, the social movement during the 1960s and 1970s was a movement composed of secondary school students and families demanding access to free education. Sendero was expanding in a region with poor organization

48 Degregori 1990.
49 “The front”, as defined by Raúl González, is a kind of “belt that conveys the correct positions of the proletariat to the whole of society”. González 1984, 20-21.
50 Ibid.
of peasants, at a time when social movements were gaining influence and expanding nationally. This was a period of land occupations, regional peasant movements, widespread strikes, and growing urban insurrection. Political expression was on the rise, but the modes through which Ayacuchanos could access these opportunities were scarce.

Still, the efforts of parties in Ayacucho to generate support at election time are strategic and striking. A complaint filed in the district of Cangallo in central Ayacucho during the presidential election campaign of 1985—an election in which APRA candidate Alan Garcia triumphed resoundingly—illustrates the charged environment in which the divisions plaguing the Left—centered crucially on the decision about whether to adopt violent struggle—emerge in the Ayacuchan sierra, deep in the remote Andean region. The “denuncia,” filed by a member of the United Left party, includes a copy of a flyer produced and distributed by APRA.\(^51\) On the flyer a simulated ballot was printed, in which the list of parties contesting the election appears, each pictured with its party symbol. APRA had revised the symbol of IU to appear as a hammer and sickle—when IU’s symbol was, in fact, a flag with the letters “IU” on it.

The complaint, which was likely filed with local authorities as well as the National Peasant Federation (CCP), refers to “the clear intent to confuse the electorate,” by suggesting that the hammer and sickle represents the Left party. In an intensely contested election amid a brutal insurgency—in a province profoundly affected by violence—the suggestion of dangerous, extreme Left elements would have taken on considerable significance for local residents. As APRA operatives’ efforts to portray the most viable Left electoral force—which consisted of a coalition of seven leftist parties—as allied with, or worse, defined by, violent communism, the effect of PCP-Sendero Luminoso on how ordinary people participated cannot be denied.

Following the 1985 general elections, the United Left evaluated its shortcomings in the face of the political right’s attempts to paint “the entire revolutionary left as terrorist, the defense of human rights in the country as expression of identification with Sendero Luminoso and its methods of struggle.”\(^52\) IU had lost considerable ground in the region of Lima, including the 19 districts it had won in the 1983 municipal elections. In the interior of the country—Arequipa, Tacna, Huancavelica—IU won, and in Ayacucho, Puno, and Cusco, they performed fairly well.

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\(^51\) The complaint, which is not dated, appears in the Archive of the CCP (Confederación Campesina del Perú) in Lima. I accessed these records on 21 August 2013.

IU critiqued its own efforts in the election as a failure to transform the party into an alternative to the AP government, permitting the consolidation of APRA as “head” of the opposition. The Left perceived its own disassociation from “the social movement” as fatal to its performance in the election. Two years earlier, Javier Diez Canseco, the Secretary General of the Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM)—a socialist party of activists founded in 1984 that joined the IU coalition—had emphasized that the demands of various social movements were central to what the institutionalized Left was trying to achieve. “The struggle in Parliament obeys the struggle of the popular movement in the street and in the country.”

This interpretation of how to represent the interests of the people, who are mobilized and making demands in their own right, differs from the approach of Sendero Luminoso leaders, who viewed their form of struggle as one carried out by the masses (the peasantry and workers), with their own role as vanguard revolutionaries directing the struggle. The other Left parties were simultaneously experiencing internal debates about the role of representation and revolution.

Ayacucho was a region where the nascent struggle to form and sustain organizations of people mobilizing for fundamental causes—education and land—was subjected to an internecine Left and Sendero’s constructive and later destructive effect on the formation of social movements. These dynamics, in the context of a transition of authority at the local level following the decline of landowners, and by the 1970s, a repressive national government, generated disillusionment and a political vacuum—a kind of disarticulation—that led many people in the 1980s to support Sendero.

**Land, reform, and political mobilization in Ayacucho**

The decline in Ayacucho of landowners as the dominant regional class, a gradual change that occurred as a result of a region-specific economic downturn which severely affected its development and production, brought about a critical change in the mechanisms of social and political intermediation in the region. In the first half of the twentieth century a crisis of the latifundia system and the development of capitalism brought unemployment, commercial marginalization and exclusion, and migration to the coast. These shifts—and the political

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54 Degregori 1990, 29-30.
disarticulation that it generated over time—became clear in the 1980s, when Sendero Luminoso was able to generate significant support among ordinary Ayacuchanos. The violence and destruction most affected Quechua-speaking indigenous Peruvians living in Andean highlands.55

Many scholars who have recently studied the politics of conflict in Peru draw on a historical image of the peasant of Ayacucho as a political actor, a seeker of national political allies that might allow them to counter decisively the siege of the local political boss.56 Various parties (APRA in the 1930s, Trotsky-ists in the 1950s, AP in the 1960s) played the role of ally to these communities, but ultimately it was General Juan Velasco Alvarado—who took power in a bloodless coup in October 1968—and his reformist ideology that empowered peasants, giving them hope that they would be able to defeat the repressive gamonales (local political bosses).

Prior to Velasco’s land reform, between 1958 and 1964, a wave of land takeovers swept the Andes, primarily in Cusco. The social movement in Ayacucho was weak, but intensifying cracks in the old landowning structure were beginning to show.57 In 1968, Velasco inaugurated the agrarian reform, which effectively eliminated large private landholdings, and the process of breakdown of the traditional order deepened. Rather than land, however, the impetus for widespread participation among peasants emerged in another cause: the movement for education reform in the late 1960s served as the pivotal experience of political and social organization for poor peasants in Ayacucho. The reopening in 1959 of the University San Cristobal in the capital city of Huamanga—at a moment when the traditional hierarchy of powerful landowners had broken down—contributed to the impulse toward mobilization, generating a cultural, economic, and political dynamism and diffusing the spread of progressive ideas.

The agrarian reform did not affect Ayacucho as much as other regions because there were few lands sufficiently large to be expropriated. Landlords in Ayacucho had been in steady decline for years, and by 1969, when riots erupted there, they were absent from the political scene.58 Landowners’ large territories began to be fragmented and disappear long before this was sanctioned by the land reform law. The demand for land was satisfied by illegally expropriating lands that were too small to be affected by the agrarian reform law. When the reform began, in much of the region no land remained to be divided up, aside from small and medium-sized

56 Rénique 2012.
57 Degregori 1990.
58 Heilman 2010.
properties, which Sendero Luminoso cadres sometimes took over to redistribute to peasants in small parcels in the 1980s. Ordinary people in Ayacucho were organizing to struggle for education reform, not for greater access to land.

The “long tradition in the region of peasant and popular confrontation against the State and local powers”\textsuperscript{59} pointed to more than a long-standing lack of credibility of the government. The breakdown of the old socio-economic order with the decline of the landowning class brought a change in the traditional power structure, and as a result, existing mechanisms of political and social intermediation that had muffled conflicts also broke down.\textsuperscript{60} This fundamental shift—and vacuum of authority—coincided with the rise of peasants’ willingness to confront injustice with mobilization, as demonstrated in the education movement. The formation of a new elite—“progressive and regionalist”—found a source of support in the university.\textsuperscript{61}

The movement for the recovery of communal lands in Ayacucho, on a considerably smaller scale than in other regions, was not a violent process. Instead, it was a gradual and sustained undertaking in which many communities bought lands from the impoverished landowners with profits from the sale of their livestock. In some areas of Ayacucho, this resulted in a sort of “private” agrarian reform, in which landowners divided up and sold their properties; many of these changes occurred before the official agrarian reform enacted by Velasco. 

\textit{Campesino} communities began to exercise an important role, mobilizing for their recognition by the state. In some cases, the communities confronted the landowners in the hope of recovering their lands and increasing their resources.

Figures from the land reform illustrate the profound discrepancy between the “anti-landowner and anti-feudal” discourse that Sendero Luminoso maintained and the socio-economic reality of land in Ayacucho. From 1970 to 1980, the state expropriated 1,493 farms and haciendas, with a total area of 7,677,083 hectares. The total area expropriated in Ayacucho during the reform process was 324,372 hectares, benefiting 18,101 agrarian families.\textsuperscript{62} These were distributed through various modalities: individual plots, agrarian production cooperatives (CAPS), groups of farmers, campesino communities, and a more inclusive arrangement (SAIS), which joined Andean peasant communities and former hacienda workers into a single large

\textsuperscript{59} Degregori 1990, 72.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. Degregori argues that the shift in local power in Ayacucho resulted in the peasant population confronting these strongholds of old power, intending to expel them from the area—sometimes with force.
\textsuperscript{61} Degregori 1990, 74.
\textsuperscript{62} Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2003, Capítulo Región Sur-Central.
cooperative. The scarce impact of the agrarian reform on the region is reflected in the creation of only four cooperatives, which brought together 155 families, out of 94,000 families organized into cooperatives nationwide.

The state, just as much as the rebels, misunderstood the growing participation of peasants in new forms of mobilization. The National System of Social Mobilization (SINAMOS) created in 1971, two years after the initiation of the agrarian reform, was an institution through which the military regime attempted to generate limited popular participation in the reform process. Not a political party or organization, SINAMOS became a bureaucracy, which promoted revolutionary discourse locally. The institution was “characteristic of the era in which the government tried to incorporate the masses while controlling them at the same time.” Velasco’s successor Morales Bermúdez shut down SINAMOS in 1976, but it had lasting effects on the ways that peasants in Ayacucho understood their roles in the reform and the revolution—circumscribed by the foregone conclusions of decisions made by bureaucrats and staged, with the result that their participation did not affect the land reform process.

In the 1970s, as the paltry fruits of the reform’s implementation were becoming clear, about twenty, small, semi-clandestine leftist political parties emerged. Over time, these Marxist groups supported and organized peasant federations to oppose the national government. As the regime gradually moved away from reformist beginnings and became more oppressive and conservative, participation in leftist movements and causes intensified throughout Peru—foremost in unions and peasant federations that challenged the military’s own worker and peasant organizations—in both urban and rural areas.

**Sendero Luminoso and the agrarian reform**

Some scholars assign considerable responsibility for Ayacuchano communities’ acceptance of Sendero violence to the perverse effect of Velasco’s influence and pledges of improved economic conditions. For instance, Jaymie Heilman shows how the unfulfilled promise of Velasco’s failed land reform in Carhuanca—a district of Vilcashuamán province—created a critical opportunity for Sendero’s violent “justice” to be executed there. Between 1982 and 1984, Carhuanca emerged as a “liberated zone”—an area securely held by rebels as a result of armed

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63 Mayer 2009, 34-5.
activities and the support of its residents, specifically for the publicly punitive actions taken against corrupt local authorities. In Luricocha, in contrast, a district of Huanta province, landholders were long involved with political parties and movements with a range of political agendas during the twentieth century, while the peasants there “shied away” from joining parties and movements and emphasized their allegiance to the Peruvian state. While the corruption of leaders of the agrarian cooperatives created in the land reform process engendered the radicalization of local, wealthy elites in Luricocha, poor indigenous peasants did not rise up, and Sendero rebels did not make advances there—this despite the fact that Augusta La Torre—future rebel leader and wife of Sendero Luminoso founder Guzmán—hailed from a Luricocha family.

Contrary to what some studies and interpretations of the movement purport, Sendero Luminoso did not speak for the peasant in Ayacucho nor did it seek to organize peasants to reclaim land and rights. “The perspective of seeing the small, arrogant nobleman expropriated may be able to arouse envy, the egalitarian spirit, or the desire of the people for revenge, but it is not enough to mobilize the whole of the campesinos, for whom investment in the Sendero insurrection is almost null, behind the banner of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought.”

In fact, Sendero Luminoso destroyed commercial networks, forcing residents to close weekly markets that formed the basis of commerce for rural Ayacuchanos, resulting in a return to the unequal economic relations that they experienced under abusive landowners. Poole and Renique emphasize the extent to which Senderista communications in the early 1970s did not address peasant concerns or the agrarian reform. Rather, their efforts were against the state and other political parties. In “Desarrollar la Guerra Popular sirviendo a la revolución mundial” (“Develop the Popular War in the service of the global revolution”), a pamphlet published in 1986, Sendero Luminoso argued that peasant membership in the cooperatives established under the agrarian reform law constituted servile relations of production. This certainly was not understood by peasants as an extension of support to their cause. Certainly, the rebels were not building a “pro-campesino” force by helping peasants reclaim their rights through mobilization.

Finally, the role of the Catholic Church in Ayacucho sets it apart from the experience of articulated mobilization in Puno before and during the internal armed conflict. While the Church

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65 Heilman 2010, 8.
66 Favre 1984, 32.
67 Poole and Renique 1991, 183. fn. 51.
68 Rénique 2003.
had a strong presence in many districts in Ayacucho, the clergy lacked a proactive orientation toward proposals and initiatives that supported the peasantry in their social and political struggles. During the armed conflict, the absence of the Church’s attention to human rights and the local effects of violence in Ayacucho were striking. The archbishop of Ayacucho famously refused to “attend to” human rights complaints, and posted a sign conveying this message to the people of Huamanga outside his office at the church.69

The Catholic Church contributed to the disarticulation that characterized the 1970s and 1980s. Church officials were allied with conservative causes in Ayacucho, to a greater extent than in other regions; they were among the more powerful landowners who held onto considerable territory. The region’s bishops pursued a political struggle with the University of San Cristobal in Huamanga during the 1970s, revoking its radio license and accusing it of “attacking the faith.”70 During the war, conservative bishops had a strong presence in the three departments in which the principal regional committee of Sendero Luminoso operated—Apurímac, Huancavelica, and Ayacucho,71 an unfortunate coincidence because in these poorest regions, the Church did not denounce military abuses.

In summary, the reform era of the 1960s and 1970s did little to effect lasting change in Ayacucho. Instead, it deepened economic inequality and the demographic and geographical marginalization of the region. As an impassioned center of social progressivism and political awareness developed at the university in Huamanga, its effects radiated throughout the province. Peasants retained the tradition of resistance that long defined their relationship to the state and their struggle for rights to land. As a new elite formed, with its radical base in the university, peasants were susceptible to the ideological whims of an increasingly authoritative and expansive sect of this leftist elite, which became the PCP-Sendero Luminoso.

Weakly articulated participation in Ayacucho—a lack of pronounced expression of peasant demands by parties, civil society, or the Church, amid the growth of a radical insurgent party rooted in high schools, universities, and teachers’ unions in the region—created conditions for divisive intra-Left contention and the establishment of contained, indoctrinated organizations controlled by Sendero. These included the MOTC, the worker and campesino movement that

69 Interview with Father Roberto Hoffman. 5 August 2013.
70 Degregori 1990, 134.
71 Interview with Javier Salazar,* 23 August 2013.
flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. But the opportunities for political expression—despite the
country’s return to electoral democracy in 1980—were neither channeled, articulated, or seized
by Ayacuchanos in sustainable ways. Despite the growing political consciousness of peasants,
they lacked the organizational cohesion that links actors and movements embracing a cause.

The roots of Ayacucho’s vulnerability are in its socio-economic transition in the 1950s
and 1960s; as landowners lost their hold on local power, peasants grew empowered to challenge
the remnants of local power structures.72 These instincts were tempered by the unmet
expectations of the agrarian reform in the region and the incursion of Sendero Luminoso as a
totalizing political force that imposed a bloody struggle on remote communities. These highland
communities lacked recourse to the state and the resilience of their own independent
organizations, mobilizing power, and representative voice. The weak articulation of connections
among peasants, political parties, and other social actors like the Church—which meant serious
limitations on mobilization, effected in part by the rebels themselves as they shut down support
for genuine social movements—had devastating consequences for peasants in Ayacucho, victims
of the armed struggle that Sendero Luminoso prioritized instead.

Mobilization and integration of peasants in the Altiplano: parties and federations in Puno

While in Ayacucho the weakening of peasant political networks coincided with Sendero
Luminoso’s imposition on daily life in some parts of the central sierra, the tides of growing
political mobilization in the high, desolate region of Puno in southern Peru permitted ordinary
people to integrate forces and ultimately prevent Sendero Luminoso from gaining a decisive
advantage. First, the robust articulation of political movements and groups—that is, not only the
simultaneous existence of disparate political actors in the region attempting to organize people—but these groups’ capacity to express the needs and demands of peasants effectively generated a
strong local defense. These demands during the 1970s and 1980s were more equitable access to
land ownership and technological agricultural assistance from the state in the face of severe
natural disasters like droughts and floods. Second, the concerted integration of the efforts of
leftist movements, including political parties, peasant federations, and Church organizations—

72 Degregori 1990.
was critical to preventing Sendero Luminoso from establishing a foothold in Puno, which did not become the “second Ayacucho” as many people feared in the early 1980s.

**Agrarian reform and agrarian contestation**

A series of mobilizations for land reform—and the social struggles and alliances that these efforts required—resulted in the development of a strong regional campesino federation in Puno, founded in 1978 by Zenobio Huarsaya and other local leaders. The mechanisms that catalyzed changing centers of power and participation are bound up with the 1969 agrarian reform and the particular ways in which it restructured political space.\(^73\) The reform created opportunities both for some peasants to seize greater authority at the local level and for numerous other contenders to compete in that same local space.

Despite expropriating around two million hectares and destroying the landlords as a class, land reform failed to improve the economic and social situation of most rural peasants in Puno. Nine out of every ten hectares taken from the landowners were incorporated into cooperatives run by managers appointed by Velasco’s Ministry of Agriculture, as in other regions. Less than 20 percent of rural families received any land. Although peasant communities and small freeholders comprised 43.3 percent of beneficiaries, they received only 9.1 percent of expropriated land.\(^74\) By 1980, land, livestock, and capital became more concentrated because of the way in which the reform was implemented—for example, by combining multiple ex-haciendas into one unit.

After 1969, then, unsatisfied expectations raised by Velasco’s land reform in the region generated opportunities for newly established leftist groups to enter the region and take advantage of the weakened local power of landholders in the countryside. Revolutionary Vanguard (VR) was most successful in constructing support among peasants and became the driving force behind the Campesino Confederation of Peru (CCP) nationally; in Puno, VR activists started to draft recruits and organize people for land invasions by 1975.

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\(^73\) Seligmann 1995.

Several waves of land takeovers between 1985 and 1987 resulted in the eventual conclusion of an agreement with the national government to restructure the land for the second time. CCP leader Héctor Cruz explained why a “reform of the reform” was necessary.

These three models of associative enterprises—SAIS, CAPS, and ERPS—possessed large extensions of land. The peasant communities had small extensions of land, and some did not have any. Also, those that they had were the most infertile lands. So, facing this situation, the Departmental Peasant Federation [of Puno] began to organize the struggle for the land. Then, there were meetings, assemblies, forums, debates, and finally mobilizations.

When the government opposed these actions, first the Belaúnde and later the Garcia administrations, the peasant federation carried out “tomas de tierra,” or land invasions. Cruz described the purpose of the takeovers as “recovery” of lands: to obligate the government to listen and consent to the main reasons that the peasant communities were retaking them. These actions, which began in December of 1985, resulted in the promulgation of two laws, one at the national level and one that was specific to restructuring in Puno. These laws amounted to a reform of the previous laws and delivered a considerable portion of the lands that had been given to associative businesses to the peasant communities.

The changes in political organizing that resulted from efforts to reform the agrarian reform were clear to participants even as they were experiencing them. “The agrarian reform changed land ownership, the gamonales disappeared, but a new form of organizing arose,” one former PUM militant and organizer of land takeovers explained, referring to the mid-1970s when broader movements, with more programmatic approaches, began to develop. This novel kind of mobilization formed part of a national trend—a rise in the role of the peasantry. As Cruz described it, “the struggle for the land was not only about land.” Democratization was occurring in parallel to the mobilization for land, as well as a process of regional decentralization in Puno. Awareness of these gradual processes among peasants, as articulated in successive regional and national peasant federation congresses, made their engagement in land reform meaningful, connected to a broader political change and movement. In addition to leftist party organizers, Church-sponsored training institutes and development NGOs supported their efforts.

75 Rénique 2004.
76 Interview with Hector Cruz. 14 August 2013.
77 Interview with Alvaro Gutierrez*. 3 July 2013.
78 Interview with Hector Cruz.
Sendero Luminoso understood that land mobilizations were critical to gaining the support of Puneño peasants. Beginning in March 1986, the rebels attempted to co-opt the process of land takeovers, offering armed protection for the lands that were taken over and directing its armed actions against the associative enterprises. The rebels showed up to a previously organized land invasion, offered weapons to participants, and in some cases forced them to burn the records of the cooperative or hacienda. These efforts were rejected by peasants, who suffered the consequences of these violent actions when Sendero Luminoso fled the scene and ran to the highlands, leaving the people to face arrest and torture by the authorities. In contrast to the planned, structured process that the regional peasant federation organized, when Sendero Luminoso attempted to co-opt the land invasions, there was “chaos, disorder”—the rebels would come in, burn buildings, and give out livestock to whoever was there.

A primary obstacle facing the insurgency in Puno was its political activity in the region for a comparatively short period of time. Radical priests and PUM formed the strongest leftist forces there; as a means of constructing a base of support among peasant leaders and people, Sendero Luminoso embraced using arms to reclaim lands and eliminate other leftist officials and activists. Sendero leaders misinterpreted the nature of the objectives and practices of campesino mobilization. Peasant leaders in Puno consistently seek to differentiate their historical struggle from that of Sendero Luminoso: “We were a democratic, organized, disciplined organization. We did not take up arms.”

The rebels lacked the military strength to provide protection for those who participated in land takeovers, leaving campesinos vulnerable. In general, Sendero Luminoso’s armed actions in the region resulted in fewer deaths and disappearances. The rebels were focused less on eliminating large numbers of people and more on recruiting key individuals who were trusted and respected in Puno’s towns and villages. They were not able to wrest this level of support from the “reformist” leftists.

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79 Interview with Enrique Vallejo,* 25 July 2013.
80 Interview with Hector Cruz.
81 Ibid.
82 Taylor 1987, 145.
Articulation of social and political actors amid insurgent actions

Coordination among the Departmental Peasant Federation of Puno (FDCP) and the party militants of VR and PUM resulted in a successful defense against the incursion of Sendero Luminoso en Puno.\textsuperscript{83} Evidence of the mobilizing advances of leftist groups in the region came in the form of targeted rebel attacks on IU and PUM officeholders and peasant leaders. In April 1987, after issuing him several warnings, Sendero Luminoso cadres assassinated Zenobio Huarsaya, FDCP founder and then-mayor of a district in Azángaro province, as he supervised the reconstruction of a bridge that had been dynamited by the rebels in the past.\textsuperscript{84} The confrontation with federation leaders and leftist militants bred clandestine armed action by other political parties against IU leaders and FDCP activists in the region. In Azángaro in February 1987, an arms cache was found in the home of a high-level APRA official in that province; police sources said the weapons were bought with regional government funds.\textsuperscript{85} IU congressman Alberto Quintanilla said that APRA paramilitary groups in Puno were operating not only against leftist activists and politicians, but also against the Church and popular movements. The direct confrontation between leftist leaders on one hand and Senderistas on the other was unique to Puno. The targets of rebel violence were mayors, town councilors, prefects, governors, NGO officials, and all APRA party representatives.\textsuperscript{86} In addition to targeting leftist politicians, Sendero Luminoso burned municipalities and agricultural cooperatives in multiple districts and destroyed the facilities of rural education institutes, like the IER-Waqrani in Ayaviri.

The Catholic Church in Puno as articulate political actor

After the 1963 Vatican II conference, Catholic priests and bishops in Puno, many of them not Peruvian by birth, had an opportunity to reflect on their work in communities that had particular cultural ideas and practices—for instance, a belief in the sacred nature of the “Pachamama”—the conception among Quechua and Aymara peoples of “mother earth.” The space for shared reflection—which was institutionalized in the form of ONIS, the National

\textsuperscript{83} Rénique 2004.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p. 559.
Office for Social Information—among many priests working in the southern Andean region resulted in their sustained support for campesinos, the poor, and their struggle for land. In the words of a Maryknoll priest who has worked for decades in Puno, “This was a big change. [Until this time] the Church was associated with the rich.” Following Vatican II, many priests returned to seeing the mission of the Church as “helping people live human life more fully—having access to good education, enough to eat, being proud of their culture, customs, language.” This new understanding of the Church’s mandate, Hoffman believes, permitted priests and sisters working in the Southern Andean Church (Iglesia del Sur Andino, or ISA) to redirect the focus of their efforts to support peasants; foreign clergy who worked in Puno studied Aymara and Quechua, “so they could speak with the people.” Laypeople were involved in the process of making the “revolutionary discourse” embodied by the Velasco reforms that emerged from the Church in Puno a reality. A human rights defender in the region emphasized the work of several Catholic laypeople who chose “the political option”—by becoming leftist leaders, party militants, and NGO workers in vulnerable rural areas—due in part to the Church’s heightened emphasis on social justice.

In addition to the spiritual guidance of sisters and priests, the Church’s profound investment in provision of support to those fighting for the rights and lives of poor peasants came in the form of several long-term initiatives: developing and supporting Radio Onda Azul, a journalistic, educational, and catechistic station based in the city of Puno that was attacked twice by Sendero Luminoso in the 1980s; establishing indigenous language and cultural institutes, part of an effort to validate indigenous identity during a period in which class identity reigned; and constructing rural training and economic development institutes in poor areas where farming and animal husbandry were central to people’s livelihoods. The first violent attack in the region, in August 1981, occurred at a Church-run rural education institute (IER) in Juli, in the Aymara zone. A large contingent of armed Senderistas besieged the IER Palermo building that housed the institute, wounding at least one Maryknoll sister. The incident generated mistrust among residents and spurred an impassioned rejection of the rebels and violence by community

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87 Interview with Roberto Hoffman.
88 Ibid.
89 Interview with Javier Salazar*. 
members.\textsuperscript{90} Sendero Luminoso retreated from the Aymara zone, by 1982 transferring the center of its actions in Puno to the northern provinces.

Behrens argues that the Catholic human rights network in Peru, which formed part of the progressive movement in the Church led by the Maryknoll missionary order, evolved from the church structures established during the preceding decades to serve the poor. These efforts brought them legitimacy, and the fact that the Church was targeted by both Sendero Luminoso and the armed forces allowed it to serve as a mediating force in society.\textsuperscript{91}

When Sendero Luminoso began killing peasant leaders and trusted leftist activists and party officials, the people turned actively against the organization.\textsuperscript{92} “[Sendero] was…killing people, destroying the works that the people had built,” peasant leader Hector Cruz emphasized. This generated a backlash from the people that the Senderistas confronted with force in 1988 and 1989. The rebels made some gains in the few universities in the region and among young Christian groups. Ultimately, the popular mobilization that had been able to achieve a second agrarian reform for peasant lands in Puno and generate greater levels of participation and leadership among women in Quechua and Aymara communities was able to prevent Sendero from establishing a genuine foothold in the department—and to keep violence as a revolutionary path from infiltrating their methods of organization. In 1991 and 1992, PUM, IU, and the leftist parties in Puno crumbled due to internal divisions and disagreements among cadres about the nature of the revolutionary path—whether or not it should involve armed struggle. The retreat of Sendero Luminoso from the region followed, not far behind the dissolution of the Left.

**Conclusion: participation and violence as political processes**

“The changing economic and political characteristics of rural society as a result of the reform measures, combined with the inability of the state to maintain control over the political life of civil society, led to the development of new power centers in the countryside that competed with and weakened the state.”\textsuperscript{93} The generation of new centers of authority occurred in

\textsuperscript{90} Interview with Roberto Hoffman.
\textsuperscript{91} Behrens 2012.
\textsuperscript{92} Interview with Ricardo Arias, *12 Jun 2013.
\textsuperscript{93} Seligmann 1995, 7.
both Ayacucho and Puno before and during the internal armed conflict. The consequences of the forms of mobilization and participation spawned by these new authoritative forces differed drastically.

From 1960 to 1980, weakly articulated participation in Ayacucho—a lack of pronounced expression of peasant demands by parties, civil society, or the Church, amid the growth of a radical insurgent party rooted in high schools, universities, and teachers’ unions—created conditions for divisive intra-Left contention and the radicalization of ascendant young people. A lack of organizational cohesion among peasants ensured that their demands would not be met, and the state maintained its distance. Senderista rebels succeeded in penetrating peasant networks and weakening existing social movements, resulting in considerable violence during the war. In Puno, in contrast, where an integrated alliance of Left parties, Catholic priests and sisters, and a robust peasant federation was able to articulate its demands and mobilize for land reform, Sendero Luminoso was not able to co-opt the social struggles and democratic processes in formation.

The modes of integration through which opposition parties and civilian social organizations collaborate help explain variation in relations among rebels and citizens. These landscapes and processes, in turn, emerge from historical conflicts, political struggles, and alliances among social and political organizations. Importantly, different political groups’ modes of cultivating social relations with civilians depend on distinct ideological interpretations and emphases, for instance Sendero leaders’ projected notion of the peasant masses as the future ‘dictatorship of the proletariat,’ who would ultimately rule in a newly reconstructed state. This reading by the rebels, which created few opportunities for the construction of indigenous peasants as citizens – in the prevailing system or the anticipated “new democracy” – led to Sendero’s recruitment of campesinos to carry out brutal violence on a path to the destruction of institutions and society in Peru.

The emergence of an armed actor like Sendero Luminoso in a democratic state reflects the political authority structures and social networks that define everyday life and which shape the effect that a rebel movement may have on people’s options for participation. I suggest that we must understand these processes in order to comprehend war in democracies, and more broadly the links between practices of politics and those of violence.
FIGURE 1.

Violence in Peru, 1980-2000: Number of deaths and disappearances* by department (region), according to sex of the victim

*Figure includes deaths and disappearances caused by both internal armed conflict and by official repressive actions.
Bibliography


