



ISSN 1850-2512 (impreso)  
ISSN 1850-2547 (en línea)

UNIVERSIDAD DE BELGRANO

# Documentos de Trabajo

**Facultad de Estudios para Graduados  
Doctorado en Ciencia Política**

**Fascists or Revolutionaries? Left and Right Politics  
of the Rural Poor**

N° 235

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Octubre 2009

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Para citar este documento:

Anderson, Leslie (2009). Fascists or Revolutionaries? Left and Right Politics of the Rural Poor. Documento de Trabajo N° 235, Universidad de Belgrano. Disponible en: [http://www.ub.edu.ar/investigaciones/dt\\_nuevos/235\\_anderson.pdf](http://www.ub.edu.ar/investigaciones/dt_nuevos/235_anderson.pdf)

**ABSTRACT.** This article compares rural support for authoritarian populism in the new democracies in western Europe and Latin America. Literature on mass-based peasant revolutions sees the rural poor as revolutionaries, but an earlier, Marxist view saw them as counter-revolutionary. What can we expect of rural people in new democracies? The article examines four cases of rural support for authoritarian populism and contrasts them with patterns of peasant leftism. Two factors explain the difference: (1) background factors (economic and social relations, the nature of land tenure) and (2) foreground factors (political leadership, organizational style, and rhetoric). The article considers these conclusions for the contemporary international context and draws implications for democratization today.

**Keywords:** • Democracy • Democratization • Fascism • Peasant politics • Peasants • Revolution

As democracy spreads beyond the advanced industrialized world and new democracies have had several elections, a troubling pattern has emerged. Electorates in these new democracies sometimes elect right-wing presidents whose behavior in office demonstrates scant regard for democratic rules. This pattern is particularly noticeable in Latin America, where Peru's Fujimori closed the Congress and violated human rights, Argentina's Menem governed by decree, and Nicaragua's Alemán used rampant corruption to control the legislature and judiciary (Anderson and Dodd, 2002). Nevertheless, Fujimori and Menem were reelected and Alemán's Liberal Party was as well – Alemán himself still influences the Liberal bloc in the Nicaraguan legislature.

Yet these Latin American electorates are not unique in their support for nondemocratic, rightist leaders who use power to violate democratic rules. Voters in western Europe evidenced the same pattern (Linz, 1980; Payne, 1980). While the right feared that mass democracy would benefit the left, in fact, early democracy in several European nations illustrated that the newly enfranchised electorate supported rightist and nondemocratic leaders. Payne (1995: 250, 252, 312, 321, 326, 395, 492) has observed that authoritarianism mitigates against fascism,<sup>1</sup> and before democracy, while monarchy still ruled Europe, fascism never emerged.

Fascism was “an authentic mass popular enthusiasm” that came once the masses entered politics through democracy (Paxton, 1998: 1). Now electorates in some Latin American nations exhibit a similar pattern of support for rightist nondemocrats, with the rural portion of the electorate being the most conservative of all.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Puzzle

While rural Latin American voters are not the only ones supporting authoritarians, their behavior is particularly puzzling because 20 years of literature on rural politics in the developing world underscored a leftist politics of the rural poor. The “peasant studies” that emerged after Vietnam found genuine leftist political sympathies among rural dwellers in the indigenous, mass-based revolutions of Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua, to name but a few (Anderson, 1994; Scott, 1976; Wolf, 1969).<sup>3</sup> Before electoral studies of new democracies, peasant studies constituted our primary view of rural political sympathies. Yet such studies found peasant leftists and revolutionaries, making the voting patterns of rural citizens in new democracies unanticipated and puzzling. This discord between the voting patterns of the rural poor in developing democracies, both those of Europe and those of Latin America, and the predominant conclusion of the literature on peasant activism prior to democracy leaves a puzzle. Is the image derived from peasant studies and emphasizing rural leftism a true reflection of the politics of the rural poor? Is it a result of global timing, with rural peoples supporting the right in the early and late 20th century and the left in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s? Alternatively, is the evidence of rural leftism an artifact of the cases chosen or scholarly political sympathies? Which is the more predominant manifestation of rural political support – are peasants fascists or revolutionaries?

## 2. The Goal

This article addresses this puzzle by exploring some of the best-known cases of rightist rural activism and searching for patterns that might explain rural support for nonprogressive, authoritarian, or fascist movements. These cases are France, Italy, Germany, and Argentina. Scrutiny of rural authoritarianism in previous eras may help us understand its recurrence today. While the article focuses upon two cases widely considered “fascist,” (Italy and Germany), it does not address the debate over fascism's defini-

tion. Instead, I examine four populist movements within fascism's "magnetic field" that evidence fascist characteristics (Burrin, 1983).

Are there patterns across societies that reveal when rural sentiments will be rightist? Some generalizations are needed if we are to reach conclusions about the voting propensity of rural citizens. If peasants are sometimes revolutionaries and sometimes fascists, how can we know how they will vote in any given election? As we move to understand rural voting in developing democracies, what circumstances might cause peasants to support the right and what might encourage rural leftism?

The remainder of this article consists of four sections (3–6) and a conclusion (Section 7). It begins with a framework for analysis (Section 3), followed by a brief historical exploration of four cases in which rural people supported rightist, fascist, or neo-fascist politics (Section 4). In studying rural support for fascism, I refer to voting records where available and to social movement activity. The purpose of this section is to search for patterns across these societies that underlie the circumstances of rural support for the right.

Section 5 summarizes the conclusions from extensive studies of peasant leftism and support for leftist social revolution. Here the literature is voluminous and theoretical, making case review and its search for abstract patterns unnecessary.

This section summarizes theory about peasant leftism. Again, my purpose is to discern patterns across societies that are associated with rural leftism.

Section 6 contrasts patterns found in right and left rural politics, underscoring differences and similarities in how the two political approaches gain rural support.

This scrutiny of rural fascism and revolution focuses upon grassroots motivation and loyalty, seeking to understand how, why, and when rural social movements have supported fascism or leftism.

### **3. A Framework for Analysis**

Before beginning this scrutiny of rural activism, I suggest a framework for understanding the reasons and motivation behind rural political activism. The framework considers the background to rural political activism (land tenure, the nature of economic crisis, and social relations) and the foreground of any specific instance of activism (the nature, skill, and effectiveness of leadership, presence of party or group organization, and the use of ideology, charisma, or ethnocentrism in the mobilizing rhetoric).<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Background*

Any specific instance of rural political activism unfolds within a context of social and economic relations pre-dating activism. Background includes whether most rural people are small landholders and proprietors or landless agrarian laborers.

Such economic background determines whether rural people see their problems as caused by a selfish or oblivious class of landlords who exploit their laborers or by a declining generalized economic circumstance for which the state itself is partially or fully responsible. The economic background thus interacts with the social background by determining the position of rural people and whom they identify as power holders responsible for their plight or capable of solving it.

Many types of social and economic backgrounds may produce severe economic crisis that pushes rural people to desperation and causes them to doubt their ability to survive. Severe national or worldwide depression may drop crop prices and curtail credit, endangering the survival of either smallholders or large landowners who pay wages. National defeat in war, especially when followed by reparations payments, may produce a similar effect. By the same token, gradual changes in social norms of reciprocity or the rise of an exploitative, aggrandizing state and national political circumstance may cause landlords incrementally to squeeze tenants or laborers to the point at which the latter no longer earn a living wage. Where rural folk are landed smallholders who would like to retain their land, they have a conservative inclination to keep

what they have and are more likely to gravitate toward the right. By contrast, landless agrarian laborers who have no land to lose live closer to the edge and see their circumstances more clearly in class terms. They are often less conservative and more likely to gravitate toward the left. Yet land tenure alone, or the lack of land ownership, cannot fully determine the leftist or rightist nature of rural activism. Rural small proprietors may act as leftists even if their tendency is in the opposite direction, as was the case in the revolutionary region of Boaco, Nicaragua, prior to 1979 (Anderson, 1994: Ch. 3). Similarly, rural laborers may become rightists, as in the case of fascist Italy.

Therefore, the background of economic crisis and the relationship to the land cannot alone determine whether rural activism moves left or right. Either situation produces an explosive rural economic crisis that can be turned in a rightist or leftist direction depending upon the nature and skill of leadership, the presence of personalized or party leadership, and the discourse leaders and activists use. These factors constitute the foreground of rural activism.

### *The Foreground*

The nature of political leadership, organizational style and skill, and the basis of the motivational rhetoric are immediate determinants of whether rural activism is rightist or leftist. The use of leftist-, socialist-, or Marxist-influenced rhetoric, if combined with effective leadership and organization, is likely to result in leftist rural activism. If rural perceptions can be articulated and captured in ideological terms, rural activists are likely to become leftists. By contrast, a rhetoric of ethnocentrism, distrust, blame, conspiracy theories, and victimization is associated with rightist activism and, if rural grievances can be captured by these themes, rural people may turn to the right. While such rightist rhetoric may be shaped by social Darwinist or racial theories, such theories never constitute a full or coherent ideology. Where ideology is more fully developed and consistent, activism is more likely to be leftist; where ideology is weak, inconsistent, or absent, activism is more likely to be rightist.

The leadership style of the activist organization is another likely foreground determinant of whether rural activism becomes leftist. Activists who operate on the basis of a group or party organization held together by ideological beliefs about prioritizing social need over individual interests are likely to generate leftist political activism. Such organizations may offer a single powerful, effective, and convincing leader, but that leader will operate within a group, party, or organizational context that includes other leaders and an organization of militants and followers. Group leadership, multiple leaders, and a strong party organization are associated with and enhanced by a leftist political rhetoric.

By contrast, the presence of a single, extremely powerful leader who relies heavily on charisma and personal style is often associated with rightist political activism. When such a leader acts deliberately to undermine the creation of an organization or party or, while allowing a party, still insists that all other leaders remain deeply subservient to "the leader," then political activism is more likely to be rightist. Personalized leadership eliminates the need for a fully developed ideology to bind followers to the movement or leader. Emotional attachment to the leader can substitute for ideological reasoning. Madsen and Snow (1991: 6) call this an irrational attachment as contrasted with the rational or thoughtful, informed loyalty that results from understanding and believing in an ideology.

The nature of political discourse and leadership style are two foreground determinant factors that work in conjunction with each other: group leadership or party organization combine with strong, consistent ideology while personalized, individualist, charismatic leadership combines with weak or absent ideology. In the sections that follow, we will consider the background and foreground determinants of cases of rural activism as well as the timing of rural activism within the international historical context.

**TABLE 1.** *Background: Land Tenure, Economic Context, and Social Relations*

	Left	Right
	Landlord/tenant or agrarian laborer	Small proprietor
Nicaragua	X	
Italy	X	
Germany		X
France (north)		X
China	X	
Vietnam	X	
Cuba	X	
Argentina		X

**TABLE 2.** *Foreground: Leadership Skill, Presence of a Party or Organization, Rhetoric, Ideology, or Charisma*

	Left	Right
	Consistent ideology, party	Single, charismatic leader
Nicaragua	X	
Italy		X
Germany		X
France (north)		X
China	X	
Vietnam	X	
Cuba	X	
Argentina		X

Table 1 foreshadows the discussion to come and shows that the background in most cases was one of landlord–tenant relations wherein rural people have multiple reasons to orient themselves leftward.<sup>5</sup> Yet more cases fall into the rightist column once we consider leadership and organizational skill, style, and rhetoric.

Leftist rural activism is in no way guaranteed by the background presence of a land-tenure situation that has made rural people agrarian laborers rather than small proprietors. Skilled rightist leadership may turn a background with a leftist propensity into a case of rightist activism. The Italian case will show how this happened. Certainly, though, some background circumstances lend themselves more readily to activism of either color. German rural dwellers were easily accessible to rightist rhetoric and activism because of the background context. In the end, of course, the political color of rural activism is determined by *both* background and foreground determinants. Let us turn now to the cases to see how background and foreground determinants interact to produce rightist or leftist political activism.

#### 4. Peasant Rightism

##### A. Henri Dorgeres and the French Greenshirts

In order to highlight rightist activism, this section concentrates on northern France between the world wars, setting aside other times and places where French peasants were leftists.<sup>6</sup> In early 20th-century France (see Irvine, 1991; Passmore, 1995; Soucy, 1986, 1995), only one fascist movement was predomi-

nantly rural: the Greenshirts of Henri Dorgeres.<sup>7</sup> It surfaced between the world wars and exemplifies the motives behind rural fascism. In northwestern France at the time, most rural people were small proprietors. Between the wars, the countryside experienced severe economic crisis and a decline in prices that lasted throughout the 1920s (Halle, 1931). It had several causes, some of which had their origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Low productive capacity caused by backward agricultural techniques was one long-standing problem (Paxton, 1997).

Wheat overproduction was another. France produced more wheat relative to its size than many other nations, and new wheat producers such as Canada, Argentina, and Australia added to the wheat surplus (Platt and Di Tella, 1985; Solberg, 1987). A declining domestic market due to low population growth and diet diversification further pressured prices downward. The Depression plus excellent harvest weather in 1932 and 1933 finally produced a price collapse (Archives of the Ministère des Finances, 1935).

Unable to sell their grain profitably, French farmers blamed the political system and the state (Tardieu, 1930). Rural debt rose, unaddressed by agricultural policies, while taxation and social security fees raised rural costs (Paxton, 1997: 20–27, 58; Queuille, 1934). As the price collapse extended to milk, meat, vegetables, and wine, peasant anger at the state attracted national political concern (*Journal officiel*, 1936).

Combining anger and fear with a crisis of confidence in the republican state, northern French peasants turned to leaders who articulated their despair. While rhetoric in defense of the peasantry came from both left and right, northern peasants began responding to the angry, emotional rhetoric of Henri Dorgeres.

This gravitation toward Dorgeres began in 1929 and peaked in 1937. Relying upon personal appearances on market day or other fora of high public attendance, Dorgeres captured peasant anger and fear. He used emotional appeals that combined a visual display of strength with a visceral exhibition of hostility. He directed this hostility toward scapegoats who represented the state locally: rural school teachers. His was a rhetoric of victimization (of the peasants), conspiracy (by the French state), and scapegoats (local middle-class intellectuals and teachers) (Paxton, 1997: 4, 30–32).

Dorgeres combined his emotional tactics with a charismatic appeal to followers and intimidation of those he defined as enemies. It was an approach that provided positive and negative emotional solidarity to his rural followers: acknowledgment of their contribution to France plus blame of those who made farming more difficult. He used both the printed word and speeches. He edited a newspaper that reached many peasants with a message of encouragement, support, anger, and blame. On market day he gathered followers into rallies, seeking to create a spectacle and to entertain, as well as to influence and convince. In his speeches, Dorgeres emphasized visual images, the threat of violence, and impressions of control. His market day appearances threatened violence (but used it less often) and frightened the targets of peasant anger. They gave the impression of menace and virile vigor.

Dorgeres envisioned a specific political configuration. He rejected parliamentary democracy because of its contentiousness and its reflection of class divisions. He eschewed class animosity in favor of corporatist class unity and was openly hostile to leftism. He placed little value on legal remedies, preferring to intimidate his enemies. His rhetoric was about community ties rather than individual rights, and authority rather than debate and disagreement. He used his followers to break strikes by and to repress the interests of agrarian labor and landless peasants. His most loyal followers were middle peasants, especially those most engaged in and vulnerable to the market (Paxton, 1997: 86–7, 102–10, 122–3, 157).

Both the background and the foreground of the northern French case promoted rightist rural activism. Rural activists were smallholders whose economic crisis was more due to state policies and generalized economic decline than to specific landlord behavior. Economic crisis threatened rural dwellers with losing their land. Into such a background context stepped Dorgeres, a relatively charismatic figure who rejected leftist explanations for the crisis. He offered no coherent ideology, but embraced blame, rural victimization, and the targeting of scapegoats as part of his explanation and solution.

Ultimately, Dorgeres's rejection of a broad, effective party organization limited his power. Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, he never sought to control the state and rejected the cross-class alliances that would have enabled him to do so. Moreover, Dorgeres never received the support of French conservatives. If the French republican state lacked legitimacy among the peasants, it retained broad support across many

other sectors of society (Soucy, 1995). For these reasons, Dorgeres's support never became national and was strongest in the north. In 1956, he won a parliamentary seat in the republican system he despised, but lost it in 1958, after which his movement gradually died (Paxton, 1997: 159–62).

### *B. Rural Fascism in Italy*

As with the French case, this scrutiny of Italian fascism concentrates upon the northern provinces where fascist support was strong. Rural concerns, motives, fears, and goals are the emphasis, since these, in a democratic setting, are most likely to influence the vote. At the point of fascism's rise in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, peasant farming operated as sharecropping (Cardoza, 1982: Ch. 1; Snowden, 1989). Peasants lived isolated from one another on the landowners' land. In return for a house and a small part of the crop, they worked the land for their landowners, providing both labor and tools. Hierarchy and vertical ties extended even into family relations. The landlord could choose the head of the extended peasant family and then use his control over that person to leverage the entire family. Isolation deprived peasant families from class support and left them powerless to confront the landlord individually.

While the exploitation inherent in the sharecropping relationship is evident, throughout the late 19th century and even into the 1910s, this system was softened by limited reciprocity from the landowners toward sharecroppers (Scott, 1976).

Landowners extended small loans in family emergencies and forgave debt when repayment became impossible. They gave gifts at Christmas and at special events such as marriages and baptisms. Reciprocity from landlords to peasants existed in place of mutuality among peasants who had little contact with each other (Corner, 1975: 2; Snowden, 1989: 18–21).

Reciprocity declined after the turn of the century as Italian agriculture faced pressures of competition and commercialization (Cardoza, 1982: Ch. 1). Peasants found their workload increased, but landlord willingness to reciprocate diminished. Over time peasants were financially squeezed while labor demands remained constant or increased. In the face of deteriorated peasant–landlord relations, oppression increased. Peasants came to see landlords as responsible for their condition and resentment rose among the rural poor.

In this context, the decline in peasant circumstances could be attributed to landlord behavior and explained by class. Using classist rhetoric, the Italian left articulated peasant concerns and captured rural loyalty. As Italy moved into the 20th century and toward World War I, the political loyalties of peasants in these northern provinces were increasingly leftist.

Adding to a social background conducive to peasant leftism, international influences of the 1910s increased the incentive for rural leftism in Italy. Initially, Russia exemplified peasant revolutionary leftism, providing a rhetoric and explanation for poverty that was ideological and class based. Then World War I increased peasant attraction to the left. The Italian army was inefficient, allowing disproportionately high casualties among peasant troops. As the magnitude of the war losses emerged, peasants remembered that the left had opposed Italian entry into the war (Corner, 1975: 30, 33–4, 37–8, 47, 67). As peasant resistance to the war grew, the army promised land ownership to peasant soldiers who stayed in the army and survived the war. Promises of land redistribution fit nicely with a leftist rhetoric that attributed rural poverty to class exploitation and advocated resource redistribution (Cardoza, 1982: 245; Corner, 1975: 10–11, 99; Snowden, 1989: 26, 33–9).

A background social and economic context that lent itself to class-based explanations of crisis, combined with international influences, resulted in strong leftist sympathies in rural northern Italy. After the war, leftist parties there organized peasants to demand better conditions. These efforts accomplished substantial improvements for the rural poor.

By the end of the 1910s, northern peasant leftism was evident in elections. In Bologna, the socialists won the 1919 elections (Cardoza, 1982: 273; Corner, 1975: 74–6, 80, 95–9). At this point, judging from social and economic factors combined with international influences, the Italian case looks like a case of peasant leftism.



Yet these same provinces became bastions of fascist support in the 1920s and 1930s. How can we explain rightist peasant sympathies in the Italian case when all background factors pointed in a leftist direction?

The answer lies in the foreground factors of leadership skill and organizational style. In the Italian case, such factors included mistakes made by leftist leaders and highly skilled organizational tactics and leadership among fascists. Let us examine these foreground factors more closely. In the face of electoral success and strong local support, leftist parties and leaders increased their demands steadily. They asked, first, for an end to the landlords' prerogative to evict peasants and, second, for peasant involvement in farming management decisions.

As leftist reforms continued, Italy's northern landowning classes felt threatened. Leftist goals appeared to move beyond reforms within current rural relations and appeared designed to change the system itself. Additionally, the state was weak and seemed unwilling to protect private property, instead making repeated concessions to the left (Cardoza, 1982: 286; Snowden, 1989: 42–53).

Landowners feared that leftist peasant support would bring Bolshevism to Italy. In retrospect, it seems likely that Italian leftist leaders moved too far too quickly.

Landlord support for the parliamentary state declined and fascism emerged as a form of landlord self-defense.

If Italian leftist leaders made mistakes, the emerging fascist leadership showed unusual foresight and skill. While it is easy to see why Italian landlords supported fascism, the early gradual movement of Italian peasants in that same direction is owing to leadership skill. Learning from the left, fascism offered emotional solidarity to the rural poor and began to articulate peasant grievances. Now the fascists, as well as the socialists, demanded respite from economic crisis and state inputs to alleviate rural poverty. But unlike the left, Italian fascism had great economic reserves upon which to draw. These were the wealth of the landowning class whose interests were the real motive behind Italian fascism, despite the sympathetic discourse presented to peasant audiences. In a direct competition involving material resources, fascism had a distinct advantage. Whereas the left could only extract material concessions gradually through reforms of the state, the fascists could bypass the state entirely and direct landlord wealth into winning back peasant loyalty and drawing peasant support away from the left.<sup>8</sup> Fascist organizers created fascist unions and encouraged peasants to join. The unions, working directly with landlords, delivered rewards and concessions quickly without having to produce changes in the laws, as the socialists were working to do.

Peasants who joined fascist unions received land; workers who joined got jobs. Peasants who remained loyal to the left received no such rewards and eventually lost the jobs and land access they had. Skilled, ruthless leadership that understood the peasant world and knew how to use fascism's superior economic base began converting peasant leftists into peasant fascists.

The Italian fascist effort also relied on personalism and charisma. Landlords used their knowledge of rural relations to pick a local leader or strongman. Some, such as Italo Balbo in Ferrara, were particularly charismatic and effective in rallying peasant support (Corner, 1975: 13, 146; Snowden, 1989: 113). As fascism grew nationally, landlords used Mussolini's charisma to increase peasant support.

As recruits became more numerous, fascist organizers gradually decreased the incentives for fascist support, replacing them with threats and sanctions for those who did not join fascism. Peasants were compelled by intimidation and demoralization to join fascist unions. Snowden (1989: 161) has characterized Italian fascism as "class warfare from above." Ultimately, rural Italian fascism became extremely violent and much more deadly than Dorgeres's movement in France. As fascism moved to take the national state, the rural struggle over control of the peasantry became violent, with fascists and socialists using violence against each other. Of the two, the fascists were the more violent and ultimately succeeded in gaining control of the countryside by killing socialists and those who resisted.<sup>9</sup>

The overall goal of rural Italian fascism to create and use a mass following of its own succeeded. As the rural situation deteriorated further in the late 1920s, fascism's ability to provide material rewards in the form of land, jobs, and other rewards became crucial in the effort to recruit peasant support and retain

peasant loyalty. Over time it became increasingly clear that it was financially beneficial to join fascism, but financially unrewarding and downright dangerous to remain a socialist. Peasants who joined fascist ranks did so because individual self-interest led them to do so and replaced the class solidarity upon which socialist loyalty and support had been built. Yet the fascist unions and the rewards they offered were also vehicles of control. Their rhetoric advocated hierarchy, class cooperation, respect for social superiors, and for class divisions (Cardoza, 1982: 315; Corner, 1975: 147; Snowden, 1989: 63–8, 97, 102–3, 176). As fascism gained the upper hand in the countryside, its controlling and repressive side became more visible, while material rewards and solidarity declined.

While rural support continued to be a decisive factor in Italian fascism, the movement went beyond its rural support base to claim urban and industrial support because its leadership understood that cross-class alliances would allow the movement to accomplish its goals, including forcing the state to protect landed interests (Adler, 1995: 259; Snowden, 1989: 151–2, 170, 176, 209). Control of the state, in turn, allowed rural fascist leaders to consolidate and retain rural support through coercion. Winning peasant support became unnecessary – peasants no longer had any choice.

Yet the period of time before intimidation and violence became the reason for rural fascist compliance requires explanation, for in that period northern Italian peasants moved toward fascism voluntarily. If Italian fascism had shown its violent face in the early days such peasant support would never have emerged and rural dwellers would have supported the left even more strongly. But Italian fascism was more skilled than that and instead showed a pretty face, convincing emotional rhetoric, charismatic leadership, and fast material rewards. This combination was effective in moving rural support to the right, voluntarily in the initial stages; once fascism had claimed the state, voluntarism became irrelevant.

While both background and foreground factors in northern France explain rural support for fascism there, the same cannot be said of Italy, where background factors largely favored the left and substantial rural support initially moved that way. Therefore the Italian case, unlike the French case, shows that foreground factors of leadership skill and organizational effectiveness can override background factors and direct rural loyalties toward the right even in situations of tenant labor, where exploitation is class based.

Because northern Italian fascism was forced to compete directly with the left, the case exemplifies how attractive the right can make itself to the rural poor. It shows why the right can be popular and why it can have more political purchasing power than the left. The direct competition for rural loyalties that the Italian case provides is of particular relevance for rural electoral contexts in developing democracies today, where the right can bankroll a flashy electoral campaign.

### *C. Nazism*

We turn now to a case where background factors favored the right, as in France, but skilled political leadership also helped the right appeal to rural people, as in Italy. Both background and foreground factors favored fascism in Germany. When Hitler began his efforts to achieve power, German agriculture was characterized by farming and landholding proprietorship rather than by the tenant and sharecropping relationship found in Italy. The economic crisis in German agriculture after World War I was, therefore, a crisis that threatened rural land ownership. It was also a crisis for which responsibility seemed to lie with the state and its political and economic policies rather than with an exploitative landowning class.

The peace treaty, for which the new Republic was held responsible, brought reparations payments from which the economy could not recover rapidly in the postwar years. The Depression then brought an even darker period for German farmers, who faced falling prices, rampant inflation, and threatened foreclosures from banks demanding repayment. These conditions were particularly pronounced in Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria.

As a nascent democracy, Weimar Germany did not command the loyalty that might be enjoyed by an older, more established democratic state. Germans were skeptical of democracy in general and German farmers more so because the timing of their economic problems coincided with the arrival of democracy. As the crisis worsened and the Weimar democracy did little to protect farmers, Germany's rural people, like the Italian landlords, increasingly doubted democracy's ability or willingness to address their griev-

ances or protect their property (Berman, 1997: 424–25; Mommsen, 1986). This social and economic background predisposed German farmers toward rightist sympathies, particularly Protestant farmers in the conservative provinces of Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria (Allen, 1973; Farquharson, 1976: Ch. 3; Rinderle and Norling, 1993).<sup>10</sup>

The crisis of German agriculture could not be explained in class terms. Germany's farmers needed credit and sustained market prices to enable them to repay loans, all within the Weimar economic and political system. They were less concerned about low wages or unemployment, although these threatened elsewhere in Germany. The decline in income and credit that emerged during the war worsened with Germany's defeat (Rinderle and Norling, 1993).

Into this background context stepped a charismatic political leader whose appeal was not ideological, but was deliberately aimed at rural areas that had previously displayed rightist sympathies. Hitler had already tried but failed to win popular support among workers in urban areas. He had learned from this failure and from his subsequent arrest that workers and the use of illegal tactics were not the best approach to gaining power. In response, he moved to win rural support using apparently legalistic tactics. In addressing farmers, Hitler appeared moderate and law-abiding, acknowledging rural grievances without threatening the class structure, and appealing to private charity for economic redress (Soucy, 1995: 14).

The Nazis organized soup kitchens and other measures to bring immediate aid to rural folk. They offered credit support and small loans to confront the credit crisis and foreclosure threats. As with the Italian fascists, each of these benefits were restricted to Nazi supporters. Hitler spoke out for policies that would protect farmers from the downward spiral of prices and from bank foreclosures. He stressed the value and dignity of German farmers and praised them as the true harbinger of German values and racial superiority. Many farmers were quite nationalistic and appeals to "Germandom" resonated in rural areas. Nazi emotional appeals held a vision of hope for the future that despairing rural people could embrace (Fritzsche, 1998: 34, 40). Yet it was replete with scapegoats: the Weimar state, the other parties, the left, and Jews.

By combining charisma, personalism, and an emotional appeal with a nonideological, nonclassist set of explanations and solutions, Nazism added rightist foreground factors to a background context that already favored rightist activism.

To these foreground factors the Nazis also brought a strong organizational capacity that magnified and broadened their efforts, but that also kept the party organization subservient to Hitler's leadership and without alternative leaders or a group leadership structure. Nazism offered a strong organization, but only one leader.

Like the Italian fascists, but unlike Dorgeres, Hitler aspired to national power and recognized the need for a broader base of support to achieve it. Eventually, he would achieve wider national support. Yet his rural support base was always very strong and it was this early rural support that made possible the NSDAP's rising electoral strength (Childers, 1983; Farquharson, 1976: Ch. 1; Fritzsche, 1998; Mommsen, 1986). Schleswig-Holstein gave Hitler an outright electoral majority in 1933 (Mommsen, 1986: Ch. 4; Paxton, 1997: 22–3, 50).

As with Italian fascism, Nazi political support derived from a combination of rewards and sanctions. In its early days of seeking power, Nazism emphasized material incentives and emotional support. Incentives included soup kitchens and crisis relief. As Nazism strengthened, its capacity for violence became more evident and it sought to control public spaces through violence. Once in power, the regime became extremely violent and coercive, with some aspects of oppression falling on rural Germans (Farquharson, 1976; Fritzsche, 1998: 140–5, 154, 193; Rinderle and Norling, 1993).

After gaining national power, Hitler's policies continued to support German farmers, who reciprocated by supporting the Nazi regime. Nazi agricultural policy offered both material support and public displays of emotional support for rural traditions (Farquharson, 1976, 1986). Material support included further credit support, price support, and a new law that disallowed foreclosures. The Nazi regime also assumed much of the rural debt that had plagued German farmers.

Emotionally, the Nazi regime used ceremonies and symbolic rewards to glorify the rural lifestyle and traditions, reward farming families that lived by the values Nazism professed, and to underscore the indispensable role farmers played in the new Germany. Many of the policies Nazism had used to gain rural support continued in the early period of the Third Reich.

#### *D. Perónism*

We turn now to a Latin American case in a post-World War II setting, that of Perónism in Argentina.<sup>11</sup> While Perónism lacked the extremism of Italian and German fascism, it shared with fascism many fundamental qualities, such as nationalism, anti-institutionalism, anti-leftism, personalism, charisma, repression of the opposition, violence, and the creation of a corporatist, cross-class alliance. It was an authoritarian populism falling within fascism's magnetic field (Burrin, 1983).

Much research on Perónism has concentrated on its industrial, urban, and working-class support, leaving the impression that it was solely a working-class movement. But before and during Perón's first nine years in power and his two elected presidencies, he received broad support from many rural provinces and rural support rose between 1946 and 1955, even as his authoritarianism grew. Let us examine Perónism's rural support.

Pre-Perónist Argentina was not a peasant society. In fact, the rural population was quite small. Across Argentina's large geographical expanse, rural people earned their living in many different ways. These included farming in the distant provinces of Neuquén, Salta, and Misiones, cattle and sheep ranching in the pampas provinces and Chubut, and agrarian labor on the sugar plantations of Tucumán. Argentina's rural population lived in a social background that might have favored either leftist or rightist activism, depending upon the province in question.

The economic background of Perónism also differs somewhat from the European cases examined so far. Rural Argentina did not experience a severe economic crisis and income deterioration prior to Perón's arrival. Instead, rural Argentina was characterized by endemic poverty which particularly affected small farmers, ranch hands known as *gauchos*, and agrarian laborers.

More central in understanding Perón's rural appeal is the political background context of rural Argentina. Pre-Perónist Argentina had a closed political system that excluded most of the population, including the working class and rural dwellers. Industrial workers in major cities had been the target of Radical Party mobilization in the 1890s and first decades of the 20th century. Some organizational ties still existed among the working class, despite years of military dictatorship. But the Radicals had made only a very limited attempt to mobilize popular support in Argentina's provinces. In fact, the laws prior to 1946 disenfranchised much of the provincial population. Either provinces were classified as "territories," without legal standing in the nation, or they were legally classified, but denied voting rights. By the mid-20th century, elections, when permitted, did not include even the Radicals, much less the unmobilized sectors and regions.

The economic background of poverty fits this context of political exclusion and neglect. Rural Argentina looked as poor and backward as any other Latin American nation, while middle-class Buenos Aires looked like New York or a European capital. In this context, any movement that mobilized the popular sectors and offered them benefits in return for their support could win a mass following. The pre-1946 military dictatorship, of which Perón was a member and which immediately preceded his regime, was also exclusionary. It emerged after the military overthrow of democratically elected President Yrigoyen in 1930. It was the dictatorship's exclusive character that gave Perón his opening. His genuine concern for the plight of the excluded popular sectors set him apart from his military partners in government. He used his position as Minister of Labor within the dictatorship to enact reforms that benefited the poor. These made him sufficiently popular to demand and win elections in 1946, primarily supported by the urban poor.

In power, Perón moved quickly to woo rural support. Where provinces had no voting rights, he granted universal suffrage; to territories that were not provinces, he extended the right to vote and incorporated them into legal status. The effort mobilized large rural areas previously excluded from national political life. Newly enfranchised rural inhabitants became Perónists. In another effort to raise support where no competition existed, Perón enfranchised women, many of whom supported him in the 1952 election (Little, 1973a, 1973b).

The political background of Perónism was one in which popular sectors felt neglected, excluded, and exploited, similar to the perceptions of farmers in northern France and Germany and of tenants in Italy. While lacking an immediate economic crisis, endemic rural poverty was an aspect of the predominant political exclusion. Rural Argentines were thus politically available to any effective leader who attended to their plight and treated them with respect.

Like pre-fascist Italy and Germany, pre-Perónist Argentina also had limited experience with and commitment to democracy. Payne writes that fascism is more likely to emerge where democracy has appeared and failed than where it has never appeared at all. A mobilized population, but one unfamiliar with or uncommitted to democratic institutions is more likely to turn toward a rightist populist leader than is a population that has not been mobilized at all. This scenario describes pre-Perónist Argentina. In 1946, at the point of Perón's election, Argentina had seen only three presidential elections and 14 years of democracy under universal male suffrage from 1916 to 1930. In such a context, voters were unlikely to recognize, much less reject, nondemocratic aspects of Perónism, especially when the movement offered tangible material rewards and a skillful leader.

We see, then, that some aspects of the background of Perónism lent themselves to either leftism or rightist populism, while the nation's overall inexperience with democracy heightened the likelihood of popular support for a rightist form of populism. Let us turn now to the foreground factors of political leadership and the organizational style of Perónism.

The leadership characteristics of Perónism favored a rightist popular movement. Even before achieving political power, Perón showed himself a skilled leader. Part of his acumen lay in recognizing that ample potential political support existed for the taking, and without competition, among the working class, the rural poor, and women. Perón was fortunate that the left was even weaker in Argentina than it had been in pre-fascist Germany. Perón thus did not need to compete for rural support as had Italy's fascists. All he needed was charisma and personalism, followed by the delivery of material rewards. He used both to win electoral victory supported by the urban poor and then used political power to deliver both to the rural poor after 1946. He consolidated his rural base after 1946 and used it throughout his nine years in power to retain his monopoly on national power and total control of the Congress.

Perón's personalism was not ideological nor grounded in a coherent, consistent doctrine. Instead, he presented himself as the savior of his people and asked followers for personal loyalty. His wife, Eva, contributed to his self-image as national savior in her speeches, in which she swore loyalty and obedience to Perón and asked the same of followers. Throughout Perón's years in power, no alternative leader ever emerged. In fact, Perón prevented the emergence of alternative leadership by playing secondary leaders off against one another and weakening all but himself in the process (McGuire, 1997). Perón also opposed the creation of a Perónist political party and sought to keep his organization a movement. He was hostile to political parties generally and saw a party as a potential threat to his control of Perónism.

Like the fascists of Italy and Germany, Perónism delivered material benefits. Like Italian fascism, the production of real reforms or rewards caused followers to confuse Perónism with a leftist movement and Perónism, like Italian fascism, counted some leftists among its followers. Linz (1980) has called Perónism leftist in its goals, but rightist in its organizational style, although that perspective ignores Perón's early close relationship with the Church and his later support for business. Like Italian and German fascism, Perónism delivered both material rewards and emotional solidarity in the form of increased self-respect to its followers. To provinces that supported his movement, Perón delivered roads, schools, electricity, potable water, and public-works projects. The Eva Perón Foundation created a nationwide patronage system whereby provincial supporters could write to Eva for individual material aid such as a sewing machine or medicine for a sick child. In the poverty of rural Argentina, such material and development efforts were the first time that many rural dwellers had ever received anything from the government. Additionally, Perón's rhetoric underscored the human value and dignity of Argentina's lower and working classes. Unlike previous presidents, Perón visited the provinces, giving speeches of encouragement and recognition and throwing the crowds handfuls of coins or small toys.

More than a generation later, rural Argentines still remember these visits with reverence and affection.

The political vacuum and the weakness of the Argentine left made Perónist efforts to mobilize rural support an easier task than that faced by any of the three fascist movements considered above. Whereas the fascist movements and leaders in the European cases had to compete for popular support, Perónism stepped into a political vacuum of untapped political support that other parties had ignored.

Limited political competition in the countryside allowed early Perónism to rely upon benefits and the positive side of popular mobilization more extensively than did Italian fascism or Nazism and to use coercion less. Perónism did not need to begin by offering benefits and then gradually decrease them, replacing rewards with intimidation or violence. Perónists did not frequently beat up rural inhabitants who were vacillating or showing reluctance to support Perón. Instead, Perón's intimidation tactics were directed at the middle and upper classes. These became the scapegoats he blamed for the plight of the poor. Perón's rhetoric was hostile toward the university community as well and he scorned professors, students, scientists, and thinkers as well as international business, large landowners, and the wealthy. Perón's intimidation tactics, like Dorgeres's, were more rhetorical and less inclined to actual violence than Italian or German fascism.

Like Italian fascism, as Perónism gained power it became more repressive and intolerant of opposition than it had been in the early mobilizational stages. Once in control of the provincial apparatuses, Perónism repressed and marginalized opposition parties and voices of dissent. Perónist-controlled provinces were not democratic and simply supported Perónism's control of national power. Perónism used provincial control to ensure that only Perónist legislators were elected to Congress. Direct election of the lower chamber, the House of Deputies, and indirect election of the Senate by provincial legislatures ensured Perónist legislators from any Perónist-controlled province. Perónist control of both chambers of Congress became a presidential system with no balance of power. Although Perón was not the first Argentine leader to use the presidentialist system in this monolithic fashion (Mustapic, 1984; Potter, 1981), its function resembled that of a fascist party-controlled system such as Mussolini's Italy.

In power, Perónism oppressed dissenters with intimidation and sporadic violence. Violence was usually directed at journalists who criticized Perónism.

Inside Congress, opposition legislators were interrupted, insulted, and shouted down when they tried to express dissenting views or put forward a bill for discussion. Many were accused of disrespect, expelled by the Perónist majority, and some were even jailed simply for disagreement.<sup>12</sup> Perónism intervened in the universities, revoking the tenure of dissident professors, forcing retirement upon those older than 55, and cutting financial aid for or ousting students who questioned the regime. At the elementary-school level, Perónism imposed Catholic religious instruction on all students in defiance of the Constitution.

Like French, Italian, and German fascism, Perónism offered material rewards and emotional solidarity to the rural poor. Like the European fascisms, Perónism was charismatic and personalistic, offering extra-institutional solutions in settings where democratic legitimacy was already low. As a result, when Perón stood for reelection in 1952, much of the rural population supported him and Perónism retained a solid hold on most provinces. Perónist rural support would outlive both Perón's first two presidencies and Perón himself. It remains an important part of Argentina's current political configuration and is only beginning to change with the development of modern democracy. Many parts of rural Argentina are electorally Perónist today.

## 5. Peasant Leftism

We turn now to a broad field of literature on peasant leftism. These studies have scrutinized peasant revolution in Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, and elsewhere (Anderson, 1994; Figes, 1989; Mao, 1994; Pearce, 1986; Scott, 1976; Wolf, 1969; Womack, 1969). This literature began by challenging Marx's negative assessment of the revolutionary potential of peasants and illustrating that peasants could be revolutionaries. But the emphasis on peasant leftism led inadvertently to the conclusion that the rural poor were naturally revolutionary, an assumption that is clearly untrue in the Argentine and European cases and is certainly not supported by voting patterns in today's democracies.

The European and Argentine cases indicate that the leftist or rightist direction of rural grievances depends upon the combination of background and foreground factors preceding rural activism. This second part of the article examines the background and foreground characteristics of rural leftism. I do this in a general fashion rather than by using case studies because so much has been written about rural leftism.

If we look for patterns wherein rural people have participated in leftist activism and revolution, we again find background evidence of severe poverty, exploitation, and deep rural crisis. These have been vividly described by Shanin (1972) and Figes (1989) for Russia, by Mao (1994) for China, by Scott (1976) for Vietnam, and by Anderson (1994) for Nicaragua, to name but a few. As the European and Argentine cases have shown, rural poverty and crisis may lead to popular activism and even explosion, but they do not in and of themselves ensure that activism will be leftist. Additional examination of the background of these cases of rural revolution is in order before we can understand why they became leftist while the

### **European and Argentine cases did not.**

The social background provides an important clue. In each of the revolutionary cases examined in the peasant literature, the predominant rural configuration is one of tenancy or of landless and near-landless agrarian labor. In some situations, rural folk were landless laborers, a social background that Paige (1975) predicts will become revolutionary.<sup>13</sup> In other contexts, rural people owned small plots, but were nonetheless dependent upon landlords for a large proportion of their income (Anderson, 1994). The social and economic background of tenancy is the more predominant characteristic of agriculture in the revolutionary cases. This differs from the context of farmers trying to retain land that characterized Germany and northern France. The problems of tenancy, of course, can be more easily explained by a rhetoric of class exploitation and the responsibility for poverty being placed upon landlords rather than upon the state itself. Here we have an initial indicator of why angry rural people in the revolutionary cases became leftists while angry Germans and followers of Dorgeres did not.<sup>14</sup> Yet the Italian case shows that rural tenancy does not guarantee rural leftism when rightist leadership is effective, convincing, and coercive and leftist leadership is not. We turn, therefore, to the foreground characteristics of leadership and organizational style in order to understand the revolutionary cases.

The nature of leadership in these cases contrasts with the leadership style of Dorgeres, Hitler, and Perón. In all of the revolutionary cases, leadership's appeal was ideological. In all but the Mexican case, that appeal was Marxist or Marxist influenced. The rhetoric of revolutionary activism was grounded in a consistent, class-based explanation for crisis and advocated a classist solution: resource redistribution through overthrowing the classist, exploitative state. Notably less present in the rhetoric of revolution was a discourse of ethnocentrism, racial superiority, exclusion, blame, scapegoats, and conspiracy theories.

The emphasis upon ideology in the leftist cases fits with the lower use of personalism and charisma. While many revolutionary leaders were charismatic, their personal appeal was framed within an ideological discourse and not offered as a reason in and of itself for following the movement. Mao, Lenin, Castro, and Ho Chi Minh exhorted followers to support them because they were good Marxists or good revolutionaries, not because of their own personal qualities as "the father," "the leader," or "the savior," tactics used by Hitler, Mussolini, and Perón.

This exhortation to follow leftist leaders because they were good revolutionaries opened the door to other good leaders as well. Many of the revolutions had more than one important leader: Lenin had Trotsky and Stalin; Zapata and Villa were equally important in Mexico; Castro had Che Guevara; and the Nicaraguan revolution had multiple leaders, including Augusto Sandino, who died in 1933, and founding father, Carlos Fonseca, who died before the revolution succeeded.

Finally, all of the cases of leftist rural revolution were promoted by a strong party organization as well as by ideology. All of the revolutionary leaders promoted party organization, itself a key part of leftist activism. This contrasts with the rightist cases, where the leader deliberately undermined party organization or kept the party deeply subservient to himself.

Thus foreground factors of leadership and organizational style go a considerable distance in explaining the rise of leftist rural activism in Russia, Mexico, China, Vietnam, and Nicaragua. These foreground factors combine with the background of rural tenancy to help us understand why the western European and Argentine cases became rightist, while the Russian, Asian, and other Latin American cases were leftist.

## 6. A Comparison of Perspectives: Right and Left Politics of the Rural Poor

As the previous sections show, rural political activism may be either rightist or leftist; rural people are not naturally predisposed either way. The extent of their land tenure is a critical determining factor, and those who have remained small proprietors are more likely to be conservative because of their desire to retain what they have. By contrast, the rural poor involved fully or partially in tenancy, sharecropping, or other interactions with landlords are more likely to see their problems in class terms and to want resource distribution, a potentially radical demand and certainly a call for change. In both cases, severe economic crisis is the immediate catalyst for action and may come from many combinations of sources.

Yet rural people assume forms and directions of political action in response to leadership, and the cases above illustrate that both rightist and leftist leaders have perspective to consider these dimensions. The strength of democracy and presence of mass political participation are factors determining rightist or leftist rural politics. In each of the cases of rural fascism or authoritarian rural support, mass political participation had already begun, but democracy was new. It lacked extensive public confidence, particularly among rural inhabitants facing trouble.

Fascism and populist authoritarianism occur in contexts of mass political involvement. As long as elitist, exclusionary authoritarianism still precludes mass participation, fascism is unlikely (Paxton, 1998; Payne, 1995). Leftist rural politics, by contrast, has developed primarily in places and times in which democracy has never made even a tentative appearance. Revolutions in which peasants played a key role have exploded against harsh, authoritarian regimes that never provided any opening for mass participation. Czarist Russia, prerevolutionary China, colonial Vietnam, Batista's Cuba, and Somoza's Nicaragua all fit this pattern.

Paradoxically, the introduction of mass politics, followed by crisis and political ineptitude, is more likely to witness rural support for fascism and its magnetic field.

Leaders also exist within an international context that itself has fads and trends. The cases of fascism and right-wing authoritarianism studied here took place in the early and mid-20th century, while those of rural leftism emerged in the mid- to late 20th century. Fascism had a heyday between 1920 and 1955, when it experienced rapid mobilization and international diffusion. Even after it was defeated in Europe, it still held attraction in Argentina, where Italian and German influence was strong. The history of fascism in Europe follows such a pattern.

By contrast, peasant leftism is largely associated with the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with mass movements in developing nations, the so-called Third World. The spread of ideas across international borders is also present here. While the Russian Revolution introduced Bolshevism to Europe, Marxism, focused upon advanced, industrial societies and labor, appeared irrelevant to agrarian societies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This changed dramatically with the Chinese Revolution of 1949 which illustrated both that Marxism was relevant for an agrarian society and that peasants could be revolutionaries. The Cuban Revolution in 1959 then forcefully introduced the notion of social revolution in an agrarian society into Latin America and thereafter followed a kind of heyday of socialism, particularly in the developing world. This period saw rural participation in socialist movements in Vietnam, Angola, Algeria, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, to name but a few. The timing and location of leftist movements that gained rural support would appear to illustrate that socialism also had a heyday and that its heyday mostly followed that of fascism, although with some overlap.

## 7. Implications for Rural Politics Today

Just as fascism was discredited and defeated after World War II, so socialism has been discredited by the 1989 demise of Soviet socialism. Yet this difference in international context behind fascism and revolution gives more, not less, pause for thought about rural political sentiments today. If neither rightist nor leftist ideas enjoy current international popularity, then rural populations in new democracies are more free now than they were in the past to direct their political loyalties and support toward the leader who most immediately addresses their concerns.



The cases and patterns of rural activism studied here have important implications for rural politics in today's developing democracies. The fact that fascism and rightist populism are more likely *after* democracy has begun and then faltered is reason for attentiveness to the factors that make rural activists rightists or leftists.

First, we should not be surprised when rightist candidates win the rural poor. As Germany, Italy, France, and Argentina illustrate, the right can be skillful in the electoral game and very sensitive to rural perspectives. In a campaign, the more effective and convincing candidate will win the peasantry whose loyalty is not predisposed either way. When the right introduces material resources, either the delivery of goods and services or a flashy campaign, peasants may vote right.

Second, leftist leaders in new democracies need to be aware of the conservatizing influence of land ownership. In developing nations, the left has often advocated and sometimes enacted land reform. Yet such a policy may subsequently reverberate against the electoral interests of the left, at least in the short run.

While this is hardly a reason to oppose land reform, it is certainly an after-effect for which the left needs to prepare itself electorally. If peasants are as likely to support the right as the left, then studies of democratic development need to be particularly attentive to rural electoral dynamics. If a skillful electoral right has ridden rural support to national power in new democracies previously, it can do so again in developing democracies today.

The same consequences of rural support for fascism's magnetic field can develop in Latin America today as developed in Europe or Argentina in the past. The patterns are demonstrably similar. Moreover, considering the political openness of today's international context, elections in developing democracies are unpredictable.

Students of democracy need to focus upon how candidates present themselves, their style, rhetoric, and appearance, as well as upon public opinion.

Campaigns matter. Leadership styles are important. Parties are essential.<sup>17</sup>

These conclusions have implications for the relationship between scholarship and democratic development. To presume that peasants are leftists without acknowledging that they may also be rightists is to romanticize rural activism.

When peasants are acting in support of social justice against the unjust landlord, big agricultural business, or the dictatorial state, those actions appear heroic, but when they are being xenophiles they are not heroes, even if their actions still demand their own version of social justice. Romanticization of peasant activism may demonize all those that peasants target, the democratic state as much as the nondemocratic state. Rural dwellers are always antistate; but when they oppose the democratic state, they may also be antidemocratic. Romanticizing peasant activism fails to acknowledge that it may contribute either to democratic development or to democratic breakdown. Students of rural activism must distinguish between these contrasting aims: activism that opens political space for further activism is constructive; activism that closes off space for debate is not.

If we recognize that rural political activism may be either leftist or rightist, then we will also understand that rural voting behavior may be either as well. We may be more attentive to the national repercussions of the rural vote than we are if we romanticize rural politics. Just as newly democratic European states were susceptible to democratic breakdown via rural activism and support, so new Latin American democracies may be similarly vulnerable. Fascism and rightist authoritarian movements within its magnetic field are more likely to appear after the arrival of mass politics than they were under authoritarianism that excluded the masses. The former condition currently describes much of Latin America and the developing world.

If we are aware that developing democracy can take a rightist turn and the electorate may elect a nondemocratic leader, then the international community, informed by a realistic scholarship, is more likely to be attentive to the need to ensure that any given election in a new democracy not be the last election. The greatest danger is that of disallowing the electorate to correct an electoral error.

The international community can play a role here, as it has in Peru and Argentina. If the domestic dynamics of a new democracy, including the possibility of a rightist, nondemocratic elected leader, are similar in Latin America today to what they were in Europe and Argentina in the early and mid-20th century, the international context has changed. Democracy enjoys a record of achievement and a level of international legitimacy and support today that it did not have in the early 20th century. International pressure for cooperation instead of competition has reached a level unknown previously. If popular electoral dynamics can still produce an authoritarian outcome, international oversight can help minimize the costs of such a choice. A realistic scholarship of the rural poor can contribute to that goal.

## Notes

1. Payne points out, however, that stable, long-term democracy also constitutes its own kind of safeguard against fascism, since under stable democracy, fascist movements always remain very small (personal communication).
2. Elections in Nicaragua since 1990 have found consistently higher levels of rural support for the right-of-center parties. The 2000 municipal election in Nicaragua demonstrated a nationwide pattern in which most urban municipalities supported the Sandinistas, while rural areas did not. Elections in Argentina in 1995, 1997, and 1999 found higher levels of support for conservative Perónist candidates in the rural provinces than in urban areas. In Peru, some of the highest levels of support for Fujimori came from rural areas.
3. These mass-based revolutions are distinct in that they do not owe their leftism to the importation of ideology and the deliberate imposition of revolution (as in eastern Europe) or to the imposition of leftism by a domestic elite who do not necessarily have a mass popular following. This latter pattern has been pertinent to several cases in Africa (see, for example, Pitcher, 2002).
4. I am indebted to Lawrence Dodd (2001) for the idea of classifying contextual factors into background and foreground characteristics.
5. Robert Paxton (2004: 30) makes a similar argument, although he does not focus on background and foreground factors. He suggests that cases involving a large, landless peasantry are those in which that peasantry will polarize to the left. By contrast, fascism develops where a middle class feels threatened.
6. On French peasant leftism, see Boswell (1998), Frader (1991), and Judt (1979).
7. Although the Dorgeres movement studied here bore a strong resemblance to fascist movements elsewhere, rural northern France had long been deeply politically conservative (see Berger, 1972). See also Paxton (1997).
8. Corner argues that the left had been insufficiently connected to the peasantry, while Snowden argues that the left had simply gone too far. In either case, the fascists found or opened political space in rural northern Italy and used it to win peasant support. See Corner (1975: 13, 147–51, 167) and Snowden (1989: 48–9).
9. After Mussolini gained control of the Italian state, he made some effort to curtail the rural violence of his supporters. See Cardoza (1982: 390) and Corner (1975: 280).
10. For discussion of the attraction of rightist politics throughout civil society, see Berman (1997). For a discussion of the ideas behind rightist mobilization, see Hamann (1999: Ch. 8 especially).
11. In her study of fascism and the extreme right in the southern cone, Sandra McGee Deutsch (1999) argues that, of the three nations she studies, Argentina's tradition of political movements sympathetic to fascism is the strongest. Given its historical, political traditions, it is unsurprising that Argentina should provide the Latin American case for this study.
12. The most famous example is Ricardo Balbín, leader of the Radical Party, who spent a year in jail.
13. See also Anderson (1993) and Anderson and Seligson (1994).
14. The literature that best captures the moral basis of rebellion is the work on the "moral economy." See E.P. Thompson (1971). For an application of this concept in southeast Asia, see Scott (1976), and in Central America, see Anderson (1994). See also Moore (1978). 15. For a more general perspective, Lawrence C. Dodd (1994: 340–3) argues that all societies face crises of learning and adaptation, and that these crises can be magnified by societal conditions in ways that generate nondemocratic outcomes or are minimized by other conditions in ways that facilitate democratic learning. The dis-

inction here between peasant groups and political outcomes would seem to illustrate conditions that facilitate each of these two patterns.

16. Shirer (1985: 201–3) writes that Hitler promised support to workers and their unions on May Day, 1933. The following day his troops raided union offices, beat up officers, and arrested union leaders, sending them later to concentration camps.
17. For a study of electoral opinion in favor of the right, see Anderson and Dodd (2005). Although the electorally victorious right in Nicaragua is not a fascist right, this book shows the results of effective rightist electoral campaigns on public opinion, even in a nation with a strong revolutionary tradition. For a summary of this argument in French, see Anderson and Dodd (2004).

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### *Acknowledgments.*

I am grateful to the following readers for comments on an earlier version of this article: Michael Agner, Larry Dodd, Carlos Escude, Emilia Gioreva, Aida Hozic, Robert Paxton, and Stanley Payne. I also appreciate the input of several anonymous reviewers for the *International Political Science Review*.





