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Political Culture in Nicaragua:

Transitions, 1991-1995

By

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Executive Summary

Ample cross-national evidence exists in the academic literature that supports the proposition that belief in the legitimacy of democratic institutions, undergirded by a political culture steeped in democratic values, is a necessary (but obviously not sufficient) condition for democratic stability. In Nicaragua the importance of democratic values is especially obvious. For most of the 20th century, Nicaragua was governed by authoritarian rule. Under these circumstances, democratic values had little opportunity to implant themselves.

This study is an effort to probe into the minds of Nicaraguans and to help determine the extent to which there are shared values supportive of stable democracy. Although the report looks at a number of values, it focuses on two fundamental ones: support for the political system (i.e., system support) and support for democratic values, especially political tolerance. Is there evidence of an increase in support for these values since the early 1990s? If there is, then there is reason for optimism. If there is not, one would not want to bank on the stability of democracy in Nicaragua. In addition, however, the report examines two other key aspects of democracy: 1) the varying images that Nicaraguans have of the proper role of government; and 2) the role of local government and its potential in strengthening Nicaraguan democracy.

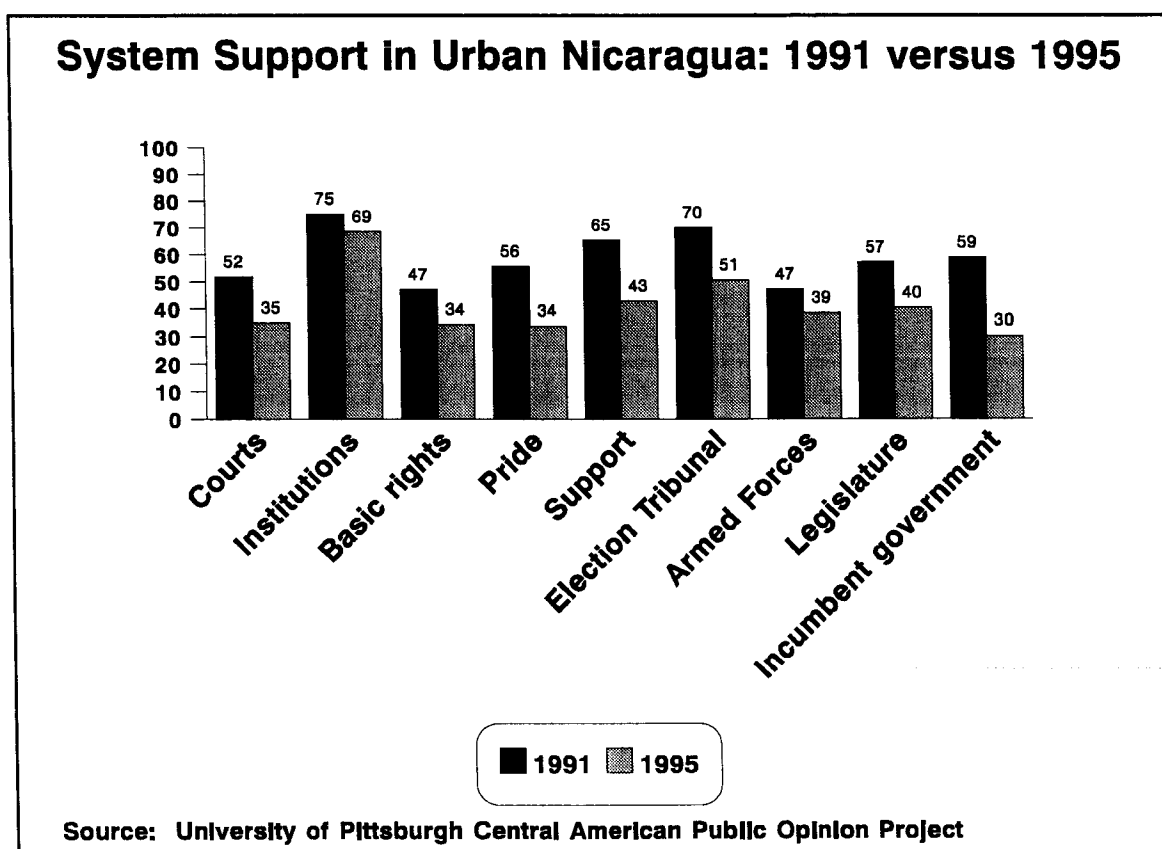
The study is based upon five different surveys of Nicaraguan public opinion drawn at different times between 1991 and 1995. Many of the questions asked in Nicaragua are identical to the ones asked in each of the other Central American countries, providing a relevant frame of reference for the analysis. No previous study of political culture in Nicaragua has employed such a rich data base, and no previous study of that country has attempted to develop explicit, empirically based linkages between attitudes of the population and stable democracy. One particularly interesting aspect of the survey data is that it includes information from a series of special samples drawn from surveys of the following groups: teachers, political leaders, public sector employees, union members, soldiers/policemen, journalists, and judges. Comparisons are made throughout the report of the attitudes of these groups with the Nicaraguan mass public.

The key findings of the study are as follows:

- ✪ Levels of tolerance in Nicaragua are about average for Central America. Nicaragua's levels are far higher than those of Guatemala, the country that is almost always the lowest in the region, are on a par with the levels found in Costa Rica, but are lower than the levels found in Honduras and Panama.
- ✪ Between 1991 and 1995 tolerance experienced some significant increases in Nicaragua, with the most notable increase coming in support for the right of dissidents to run for office. In comparative terms, however, the increase is rather

small, generally maintaining Nicaragua's position relative to the other countries in the region.

- ★ Support for the political system suffered major declines between 1991 and 1995 (see figure below). For each of nine items measuring system support, statistically significant declines occurred. Moreover, while in 1991 seven of the nine measures received a score above the midpoint of 50 on a 0-100 scale, and the two that fell below it were only fractionally lower (score of 47), by 1995 only two of the items (support for institutions and the electoral tribunal) scored at or above the midpoint. This means that the average Nicaraguan in the sample was located on the negative end of the system support continuum by 1995, having shifted from the positive end in 1991.



- ★ Over the long run, stable democracy requires that citizens possess the combination of political tolerance and support for the political system. The survey data for 1991 and 1995 have been joined to show the proportion of citizens in Nicaragua with this combination of attitudes. The results of this analysis appear in the table below where it is shown that there was considerable shifting of the population between 1991 and 1995. Much of this shift can be directly attributed to the significant decreases in system support between 1991 and 1995, offset in minor part by small increases in tolerance. The most important change was a large decrease in the

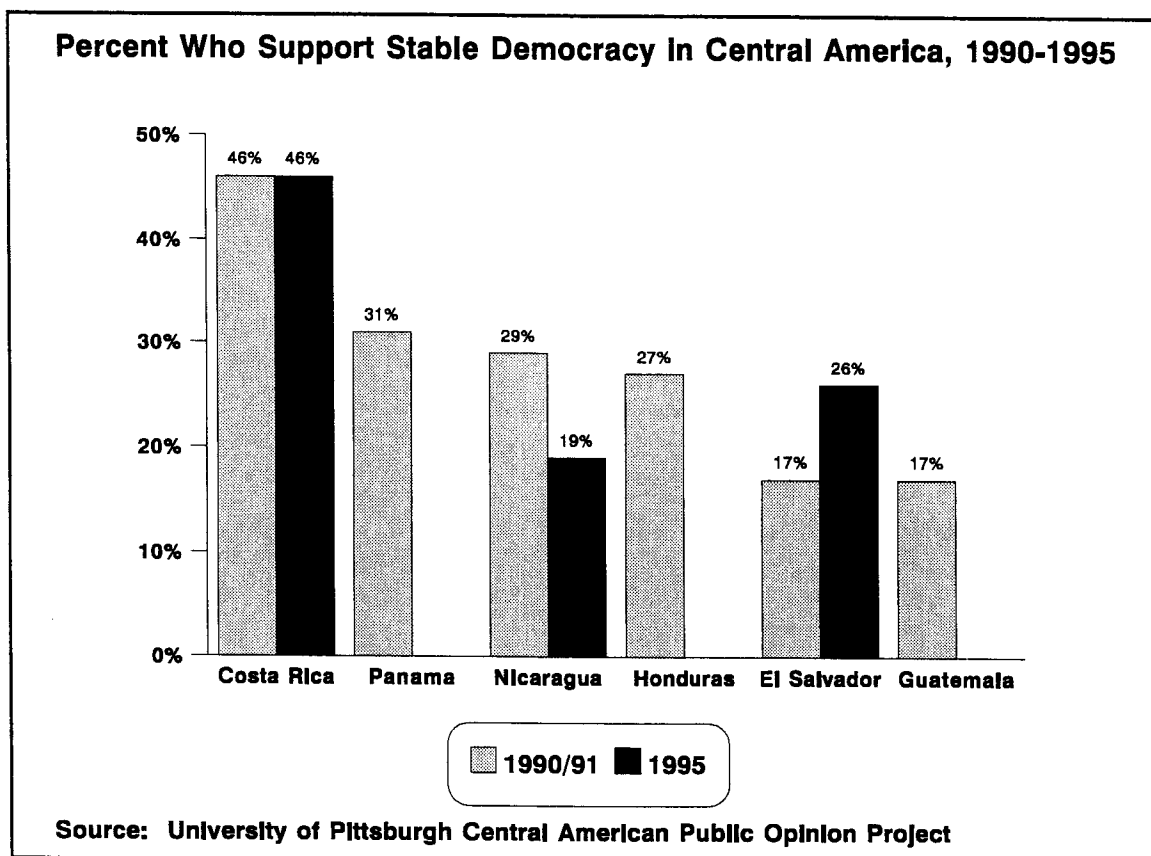
stable democracy cell, moving from nearly one-third of the population in 1991 to less than one-fifth of the population in 1995. At the same time, there was a major increase in those who neither are tolerant nor support the system, i.e., the “democratic breakdown cell,” which nearly doubled from 17% to 30%. There was a corresponding decline in the authoritarianism cell, down from 36% to 16%. In sum, whereas Nicaraguan citizens were predominantly in the stable cells in 1991, by 1995 they were predominantly in the unstable cells.

**Empirical Relationship Between
Tolerance and System Support
in Nicaragua, 1991-1995^a**

		Tolerance			
		High		Low	
System support	High	Stable Democracy		Authoritarianism	
				1991: 29%	1995: 19%
Low	Low	Unstable Democracy		Democratic Breakdown	
				1991: 18%	1995: 35%

^aThese percentages are based on the five core items of the system support scale rather than the nine- and eleven-item series reported on elsewhere. See text for complete details.

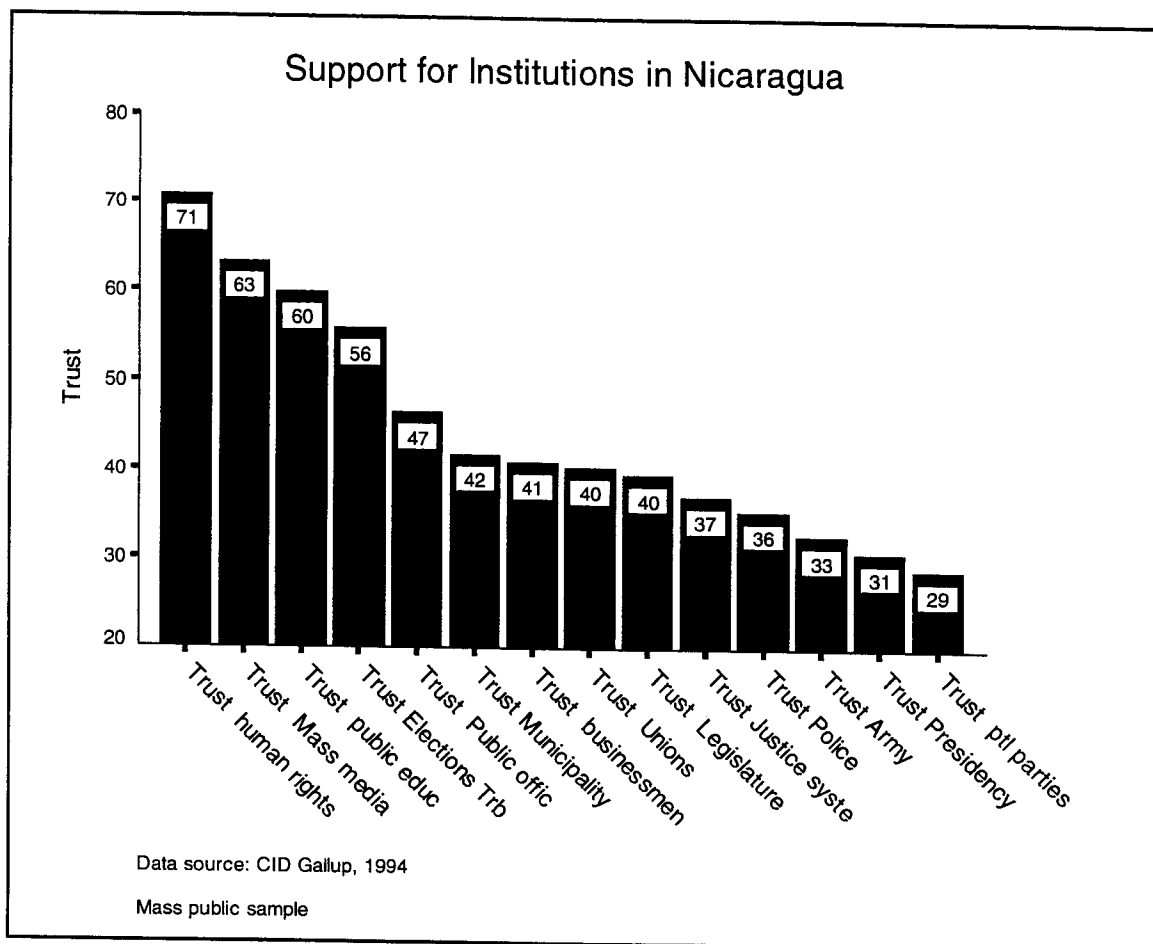
These findings are very discouraging. Nearly one-third of the residents of Managua and other key urban areas of Nicaragua neither support their system nor support key democratic liberties. When compared to Costa Rica, in which only 5% of the urban population has that combination of attitudes and 46% are in the stable democracy cell, it is clear that Nicaragua has a long way to go until it can enjoy the stable democracy that Costa Rica has experienced. El Salvador has also experienced a marked increase in the stable democracy cell since 1991. The comparative figures for Central America appear in the following graph:



- ★ One of the most common findings in research on political tolerance is that it is closely correlated with education; the higher the education, the greater the tolerance. We found that pattern in other Central American countries. Nicaragua fits this pattern. It also fits the pattern of finding lower tolerance among females, even when education is controlled.
- ★ The ideologically charged atmosphere in Nicaragua suggests that system support may be directly linked to ideology. The hypothesis is that low system support is found among the left, whose party is out of power, while high support is found among the right. In fact, that is precisely what the data show, with low support among the left and significantly higher support among the right.
- ★ The mass public is significantly more intolerant of the rights of unpopular groups than are those of any other group. Within the special groups, there are also marked differences, with judges and journalists being the most tolerant, and public employees and teachers being the least. The comparatively low tolerance scores of the teachers is disturbing for two reasons. First, teachers are more educated than any other group in the sample, and since tolerance is associated with education in Nicaragua (and elsewhere) one would presume that the teachers

should be more tolerant than any other group. Second, since teachers are one of the most important transmission belts for attitudes in any society, probably second only to parents, one would have hoped to find a higher level of tolerance among this group than among others. It is important not to exaggerate this difference, however, since the scores of the teachers are considerably above the mass public and not that far below the most tolerant group (journalists).

- ✪ The mass public, while the least tolerant politically, is the most supportive of the system, followed by judges and the police/soldier group. Less supportive were teachers, leaders, and journalists. Union members were the least supportive of any group. These differences persist even when attitudes toward the incumbent Chamorro administration are taken into account.
- ✪ Ideology is an important factor in Nicaragua. The mass public, as a group, is far to the right of the special groups as a whole, and dramatically further to the right than are the political leaders and journalists. Indeed, the mass public is further to the right than the police and soldier group, a finding that is perhaps unique to Nicaragua, a country in which the Sandinistas for a number of years had a very strong influence over recruitment into these areas of public service. The remainder of the public bureaucracy, however, is much closer to the mass public in its ideological orientation. Gender differences are not great for most of the groups, with males and females having almost identical scores in the mass public sample.
- ✪ The most trusted institutions in Nicaragua are the human rights organizations, followed by the mass media, as is shown in the figure below. There also is considerable confidence in public school teachers, a factor that suggests that they might serve as a good medium to increase support for democracy. It should be kept in mind, however, that the level of tolerance among teachers was found to be relatively low. Therefore, Nicaraguans trust teachers who may be imparting to the students an anti-democratic message. The Supreme Electoral Commission is also relatively high in trust, a finding that augers well for the probable legitimacy of the next round of elections in Nicaragua. Trust in the presidency and political parties and the judicial system is very low.



- The results of over a decade of dramatic shifts in political regime type have not been favorable for Nicaragua's economic development. As is shown in the figure below, since the mid 1970s, the GDP per capita began to decline and by the 1990s had fallen to historical lows; by 1994, the GDP of Nicaragua was no higher than it was in 1920, the earliest point for which data exist for the Central America region.

- ✧ The more education Nicaraguans have, the more likely they are to select equality over liberty.
- ✧ Specific application of these general principals emerged in the study. For most groups, two-thirds and more of those interviews oppose expropriation of private property. The mass public offers the strongest opposition to expropriation of any of the groups in the survey, with over 75% opposing it. The higher the level of individual education, the stronger the support for expropriation. Male/females differences are minimal.
- ✧ A majority of Nicaraguans favor free enterprise over government control. Among the mass public, 56% support free enterprise, whereas among the various special groups, support is higher, reaching 80% among journalists. When it comes to government control of the private sector, the relationship with education is dramatically reversed. Educated Nicaraguans, therefore, favor the principle of equality over individual liberty and are willing to support expropriation when necessary, but they strongly oppose government intervention in private business. A majority of less well educated Nicaraguans, however, while favoring free enterprise, are more likely to support state control over private business.
- ✧ The low levels of system support found in contemporary Nicaragua indicate that citizens may prefer a political regime other than the one they now have. The survey asked respondents to consider a series of social/political problems and to say which kind of system best manages such problems. Three types of systems were given as options: democratic government, one-party government, or military government. Two-thirds of the mass public chose democracy, with nearly identical responses for all problems except combating crime, where democracy fell slightly to 64%. The results are similar for the special groups, except that the special samples, as a whole, are even more likely to select democracy as the best solution to national problems. With the exception of fighting crime (70%) and fighting immorality (74%), three-quarters or more of the special sample respondents selected democracy.
- ✧ Municipal level participation in Nicaragua is reasonably high when compared to other countries in Central America. In general, males participate more than females.
- ✧ *There is clear evidence that evaluation of local government is linked to system support at the national level.* In particular, positive evaluations of municipal services and perception of treatment by local government are directly linked to higher system support. Citizens of Nicaragua who are more willing to pay increased local taxes are also more supportive of the national system. In addition, citizens who believe their municipal officials are responsive to the wishes of citizens are more likely to be supportive of the national system.

- ✪ Nearly a majority of Nicaraguans believe that their municipalities respond better to community problems than does the national government. Indeed, they believe that municipalities have responded better than any other level of government.

Chapter 1. Introduction: Theory and Sample Characteristics

Democratic Theory

In 1990, democratic elections were held in Nicaragua and produced for the first time in the history of the country a peaceful turnover from an incumbent party to an opposition party. As a result of the election, Nicaragua accomplished two key things. First, it paved the way for the ending of over a decade of violent struggle, which began with the insurrection that overthrew Somoza and continued up through the 1990 election. The violence of that period should not be understated since its impact was widespread. The best estimates are that some 80,000 Nicaraguans lost their lives, about 1 out of every 38 people in the country, or ten times that suffered by the United States in World War II.¹ In a recent study, I found that one in every three Nicaraguan families lost a member of their family to the war.²

Second, the elections laid the first, albeit tentative, foundations for the institutional basis of a democratic society. Nicaraguans had long been accustomed to dictatorships, arbitrary rule and arrest, and there was little if any national tradition on which to build a democratic society. A reformed constitution has been drafted, new election laws are in place and new elections are being actively planned.

Despite the peace and the establishment of key democratic institutions, Nicaragua has a long way to go before it can be thought of as a stable democracy.³ Nicaragua's

¹In El Salvador, estimates are that between 75,000 and 80,000 people lost their lives. In the United States, 362,561 members of the armed forces were killed between December, 1941 and the end of the war. See Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History*, New York: Holt, 1989, p. 746.

²For details on war casualties see Mitchell A. Seligson and Vincent McElhinny, "Low Intensity Warfare, High Intensity Death: The Demographic Impact of the Wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua," paper delivered to the conference, "Seminario Internacional sobre la Población del Istmo Centroamericano," Octubre 19-21 de 1995, San José, Costa Rica, sponsored by the Rand Corporation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Universidad de Costa Rica.

³The theoretical argument that appears in this section relies heavily upon Mitchell A. Seligson and Ricardo Córdova M. 1995. *El Salvador: De la Guerra a la Paz, una Cultura Política en Transición*. San Salvador: IDELA,

democratic development in the post civil war period mirrors that of a number of countries around the world that are emerging from a long period of turmoil and authoritarian rule. International agencies, including USAID, are working to strengthen young democracies of the developing world. Such efforts have included programs to strengthen legislatures, judiciaries and the electoral system so as to help guarantee majority rule and minority rights, the fundamental factors that make democratic stability possible. Unless such rights are guaranteed, majorities, James Madison argued in the classic work, *The Federalist*, No. 10, will tyrannize minorities, and political stability will be elusive. In each country, the immediate goal of the effort has been to make the institutions more efficient and, at the same time, more responsive to the citizenry. In many cases such efforts have achieved notable success; legislatures pass bills more efficiently, courts process cases more quickly and election tribunals administer fairer, more transparent elections.

In democracies, efficient, constitutionally legitimate institutions are, however, no guarantee that the wishes of the majority will be respected. Consider the sorry case of child labor legislation in the United States. In 1916, decades after similar legislation had been passed in Western Europe, the U.S. Congress passed the first child labor legislation in the history of the country by a vote of 337-46 in the House and 52-12 in the Senate. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that legislation unconstitutional by a vote of 8-1. A constitutional amendment was introduced with overwhelming support of Congress and supported by the majority of the state legislatures, but it was not until 1942 that the Supreme Court upheld child labor laws as constitutional. Thus, for decades a quintessential democratic institution, the U.S. Supreme Court, was able not only to thwart the wishes of the overwhelming majority of elected national representatives and the majority of elected state legislatures, but by all accounts the overwhelming wishes of the American public.⁴

If democratic institutions offer no guarantee of majority rule, minority rights and ultimately democratic stability, what does? According to Robert Dahl's classic statement, it is the values of citizens that offer this guarantee:

The extent of consensus on democratic norms, social training in the norms, consensus on policy alternatives, and political activity: the extent to which these and other conditions are present determines the viability of democracy itself and provides protections for minorities.⁵

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⁴The review of child labor legislation is contained in Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. University of Chicago Press, 1956.

⁵Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 135. In the original quotation, Dahl uses the term he coined, "polyarchy" to refer to democracy. The term "democracy" has been substituted here to avoid confusion with the less-known terminology.

Ample cross-national evidence exists in the academic literature that supports the proposition that belief in the legitimacy of democratic institutions, undergirded by a political culture steeped in democratic values, is a necessary (but obviously not sufficient) condition for democratic stability. On the one hand, it has been demonstrated that almost all developing countries are regularly confronted by serious challenges to their stability. In recent years, those challenges have increasingly come in the form of economic crises brought on either by flawed macro-economic policies or external challenges. In other cases, domestic insurgency has caused many a regime to totter and in some instances fall. Mexico today faces both such challenges. Yet, not all regimes collapse; the ability of democratic regimes to survive the threat of breakdown has been traced directly to the commitment of citizens and elites to democratic rules of the game. One recent study of the widespread breakdowns of democracy in Latin America in the sixties and seventies in such countries as Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay shows how beliefs, preferences and actions were central and far more important than institutions.⁶ In contrast, another study has demonstrated that a deep commitment to the political system made it possible for Costa Rica to ride out in the early 1980s its most severe economic crisis of the century with no serious threat to stability.⁷ Institutions are, of course, not irrelevant, but by themselves cannot insure democratic stability irrespective of their efficiency.

On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that the success of reforms designed to establish and strengthen democratic institutions can only succeed in an environment in which citizens develop support for those institutions. In Italy, for example, in 1970 new regional governments were created in a major experiment in decentralization. Those regional governments that succeeded are ones in which civic culture values predominated.⁸

In light of this evidence, it is unfortunate that more attention has not been placed on the shaping and measurement of democratic values. The emphasis tends to favor the institutional side under the misguided assumption that "getting the institutions right" will ensure democratic stability. In fact, unless citizens believe that their courts grant them fair trials and their legislatures pass fair laws, efficient court systems and legislatures will not

⁶See Youssef Cohen, *Radicals, Reformers and Reactionaries: The Prisoner's Dilemma and the Collapse of Democracy in Latin America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁷See "Democratic Stability and Economic Crisis: Costa Rica, 1978-1983," Mitchell A. Seligson and Edward N. Muller, *International Studies Quarterly*, 31(September, 1987), pp. 301-326. Reprinted as, "Estabilidad democrática y crisis económica: Costa Rica, 1978-1983, *Anuario de estudios Centroamericanos*, Vol. 16 (2), 1990 and Vol. 17 (1), 1991, pp. 71-92. Also see, "Ordinary Elections in Extraordinary Times: The Political Economy of Voting in Costa Rica." In John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson, eds., *Elections and Democracy in Central America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Reprinted as "Elecciones ordinarias en tiempos extraordinarios: la economía política del voto en Costa Rica," Co-authored with Miguel Gómez Barrantes, *Anuario de estudios centroamericanos*, 13(1), 1987, pp. 5-24.

⁸See Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

promote stable democracy. Furthermore, unless citizens are committed to the principles of majority rule and minority rights, unless they are willing to tolerate the rights of those with whom they disagree, democratic stability may be ephemeral. In short, citizen support for key democratic institutions coupled with widespread tolerance of opposition views and other minorities, among both the mass public and key elite groups, are fundamental requisites for stable democracy.

In Nicaragua the importance of democratic values is especially obvious. For most of the 20th century, Nicaragua was governed by authoritarian rule. Under these circumstances, democratic values had little opportunity to implant themselves.

This study is an effort to probe into the minds of Nicaraguans and to help determine the extent to which there are shared values supportive of stable democracy. Although the report will look at a number of values, I will focus on two fundamental values: support for the political system (what I will call system support) and support for democratic values, especially political tolerance. The question I will ask is straightforward: is there evidence of an increase in support for these values since the early 1990s? If there is, then there is reason for optimism. If there is not, one would not want to bank on the stability of democracy in Nicaragua. In addition, however, the report will look at two other key aspects of democracy. Chapter 3 examines the varying images that Nicaraguans have of the proper role of government. Chapter 4 looks at local government and its potential role in strengthening Nicaraguan democracy.

The study uses five different data sets drawn at different times between 1991 and 1995. The interested reader is advised to consult the appendix of this report to learn about the details of those samples.

Sample Characteristics

The paragraphs below describe the basic characteristics of the 1994 CID Gallup sample, which is analyzed here for the first time. Throughout the remainder of this chapter and in many of the analyses that follow, comparisons are made between the mass sample and a series of special groups included in the 1994 Gallup survey. The basic characteristics of the other samples utilized in this report have already been described in the publications cited above.

Age

Nicaragua is a country comprised of many young people as a direct result of its high birth rate. It comes as no surprise that the average age in the mass public sample for this

study was 33 for both males and females (see Figure I.1 below) Recall that the voting age in Nicaragua is 16, so the survey sample included all those 16 and older. The combination of the high birth rate and the young voting age produces an average age far younger than in most survey samples conducted in other countries. In nearby El Salvador, the average age was 37.

It is important to point out that the Gallup survey did not code in the data base the actual age of the respondents interviewed, but only the age cohort. This means that all of those ages 25-29, for example were assigned a single code. Further complicating the reporting of age is that the age cohorts are not uniform across each of the special group samples. In particular, the age groups 16-19 and 20-24 are collapsed into a single cohort in some of the samples, while at the other extreme, different groupings are utilized for those in the 45 and above range. For this reason, the average ages given below should only be taken as rough guides to the average ages of the respondents in the various groupings.

Leaving aside the issue of precision of the reported ages, significant differences emerge among the groups. The male police officers and soldiers are by far the youngest of them all, followed by public employees and judges. It is very surprising to find judges of such a young average age, since in most countries, on average, we find judges who are far older. Perhaps this is a result of major changes in the judiciary initiated by the Sandinistas after the overthrow of Somoza. The oldest two groups were the union members and the political leaders. The high average age of the leaders comes as no surprise since leadership often comes with age, but the high average among union members is a surprise. In all likelihood it is a reflection of recruitment patterns within the unions interviewed.

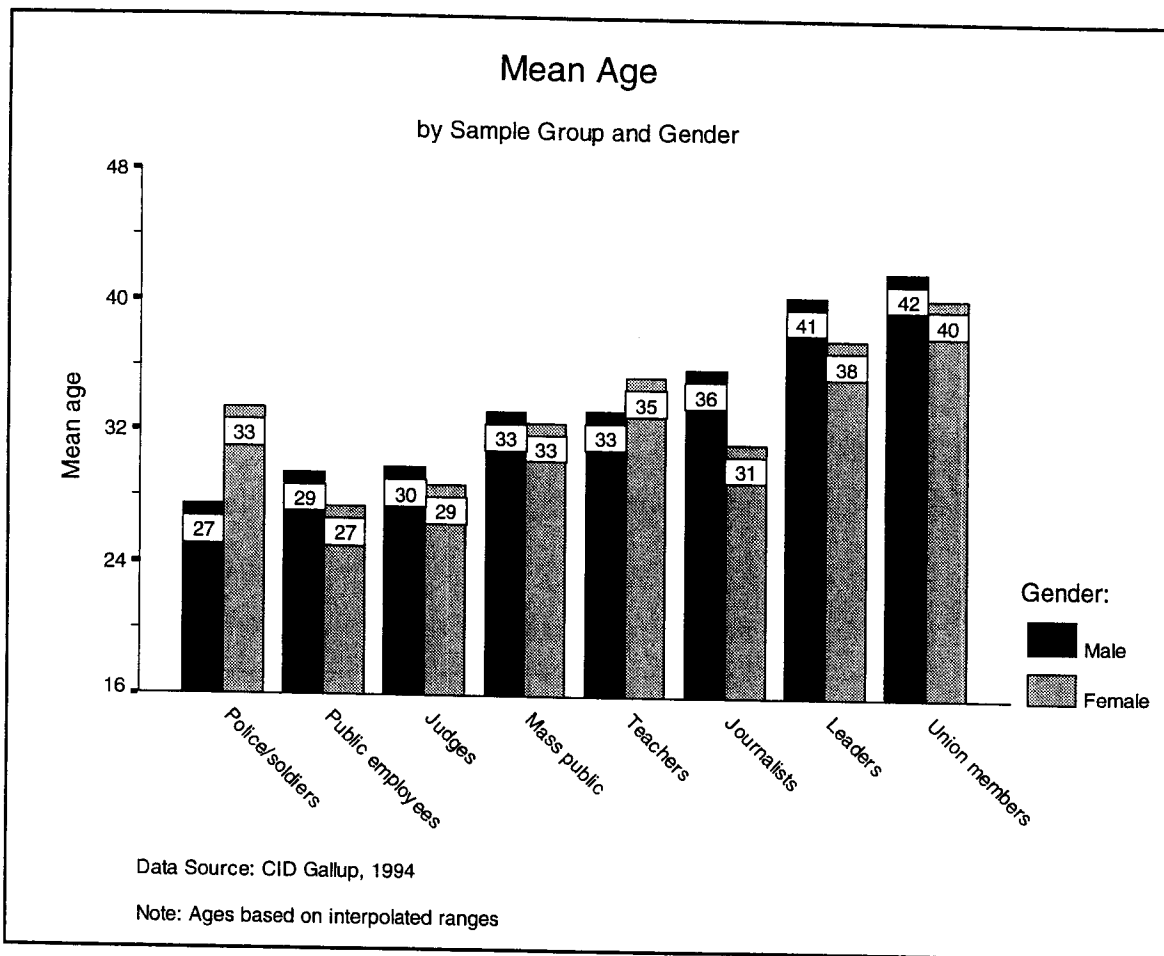


Figure 1.1

Education

The special samples of 1994 have very different educational profiles, as can be seen in figure 1.2. The data were coded to divide the sample into those with no education, primary education, secondary education and higher education. In the figure that follows, the mass public, union members and the police/soldiers group together, showing no statistically significant differences.⁹ At the other extreme, teachers, journalists and judges have the highest average levels of education in the study.

⁹The Duncan post-hoc test is utilized here for this significance test.

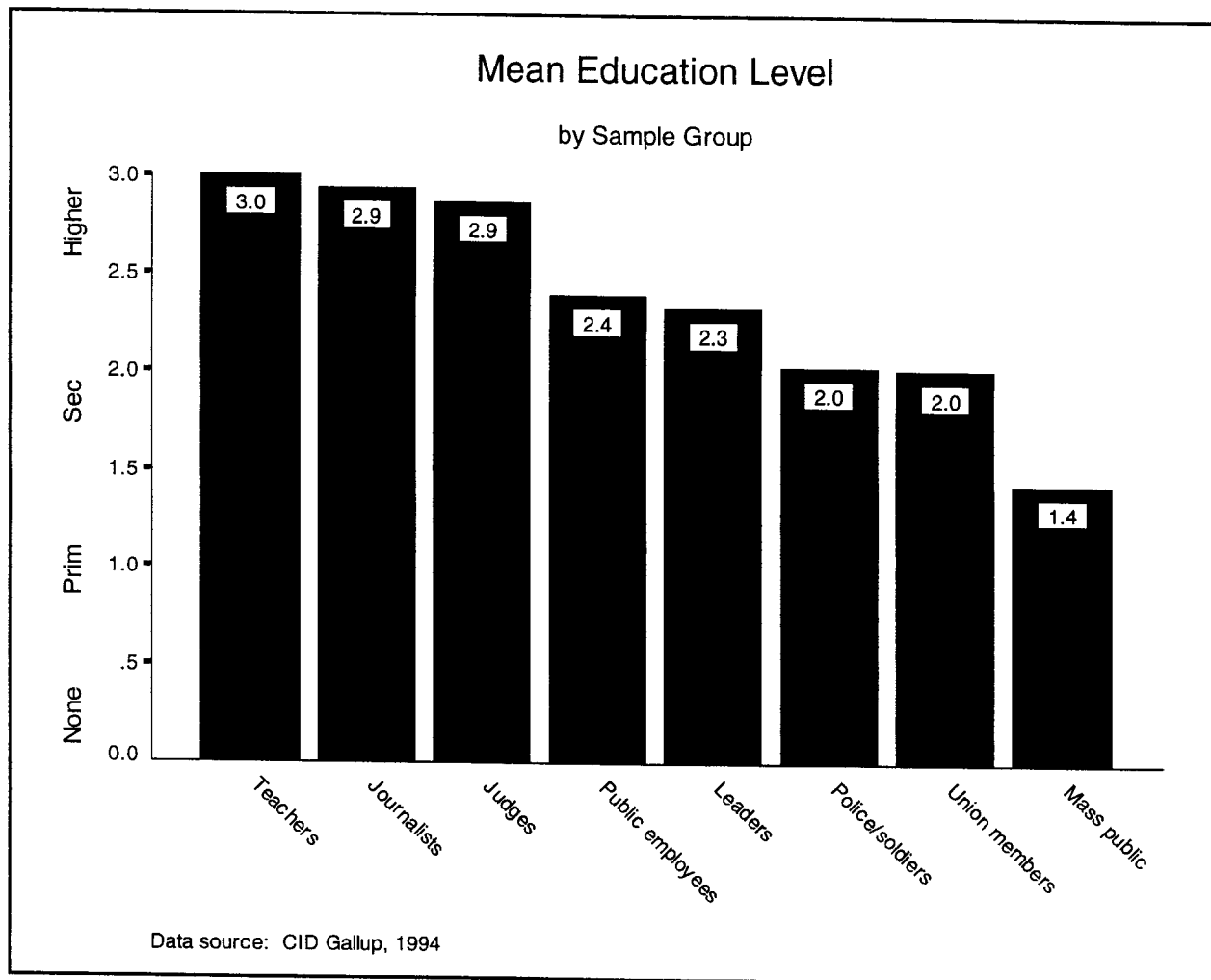


Figure 1.2

Socio-economic status

It is difficult to measure the relative wealth of people in Nicaragua using the criterion of salary or income since so many people work in agriculture or are involved with barter trade. As a result, a better indication of individual wealth is the property they own. In the Gallup surveys, individuals were asked about their ownership of various home appliances, including radios, TVs, refrigerators and motor vehicles. In addition, the respondents were asked if their house had electricity or a phone. In Table 1.2 below the distribution of the mass public and the special samples is shown for these variables. Unfortunately, these items were not asked by Gallup of the journalists, so no information is available for them.

Not surprisingly, the mass public shows fewer signs of wealth than any of the special groups interviewed. For example, fewer than 10% of the mass public has a phone, compared to nearly half of the judges and over a quarter of the teachers. As a group, the judges are at the top of the socio-economic scale, and the union members and police/soldiers at the bottom.

Table 1.4 Appliances Owned by Respondents, by Sample Group

	Mass public	Judges	Leaders	Police/ soldiers	Teachers	Public employees	Union members	Entire sample Mean %
	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	
House has electricity								
Yes	82.4%	100.0%	ND	95.0%	100.0%	ND	98.1%	87.4%
No	17.6%			5.0%			1.9%	12.6%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%
House has telephone								
Yes	9.4%	49.7%	38.7%	19.3%	26.0%	22.7%	12.0%	16.7%
No	90.6%	50.3%	61.3%	80.7%	74.0%	77.3%	88.0%	83.3%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
House has radio								
Yes	79.8%	99.0%	96.0%	90.0%	96.3%	91.9%	91.8%	85.4%
No	20.2%	1.0%	4.0%	10.0%	3.7%	8.1%	8.2%	14.6%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
House has TV								
Yes	66.0%	97.0%	75.3%	80.7%	97.0%	72.4%	91.3%	73.9%
No	34.0%	3.0%	24.7%	19.3%	3.0%	27.6%	8.7%	26.1%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
House has refrigerator								
Yes	28.7%	84.1%	72.0%	43.0%	60.0%	63.3%	47.6%	41.6%
No	71.3%	15.9%	28.0%	57.0%	40.0%	36.7%	52.4%	58.4%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
House has motor vehicle								
Yes	9.8%	43.4%	ND	23.3%	17.3%	ND	22.6%	15.2%
No	90.2%	56.6%		76.7%	82.7%		77.4%	84.8%
Group Total	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%

ND= no data

Conclusions

In this chapter three basic points have been made. First, it has been argued that the values of the population matter when it comes to assuring the stability of democracy. Countries in which people are not committed to the political system and which are intolerant of the rights of others, especially minorities, are not likely to endure as democracies. Second, in order to examine the values of Nicaraguans this report will use five distinct data sets, involving interviews with a total of many thousands of citizens, urban and rural, young and old, rich and poor. The multiplicity of data sets allows comparison between the values that Nicaraguans hold today with those they held in the early 1990s. In addition, the data sets permit comparison of Nicaraguan attitudes with those of the citizens of the five other Spanish-speaking Central American republics. Third, the basic demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the 1994 CID Gallup data set have been presented so as to give the reader an idea of how the Nicaraguan mass public compares and contrasts to seven samples of special groups interviewed for this study: journalists, judges, political leaders, police and military officers, school teachers, public employees and union members.

In the chapter that follows, the analysis will focus directly on the key values being studied in this report: system support and political tolerance. These values will be studied in both their historical and cross-national context. The chapter suggests a theoretical model that may allow one to predict the direction of democratic stability in Nicaragua, and presents data that fit that model. Finally, demographic and educational variation in the values of Nicaraguans on these key variables will be presented, as will be the differences in the values of the special groups.

Chapter 2.

Political Support and Political Tolerance: Predictors of Democratic Stability in Nicaragua, 1991-1995

This chapter examines the set of attitudes that are most directly linked to the maintenance of a democratic political system: political support and political tolerance.¹ I will argue in this chapter that in order for stable democracy to emerge in Nicaragua, it will be necessary to find the way to increase the proportion of its citizens who are both politically tolerant and who support the basic institutions of their political system. As will be shown, since 1991, system support has declined steeply, placing in doubt the ability of the country to maintain its stability.

The plan of this chapter is first to discuss each of these two clusters of variables. That will be followed by an examination of the theoretical interrelationship of the two. The chapter will then present the data from the 1991 and 1995 surveys in order to examine changes in these attitudes and their interrelationships. Finally, the chapter examines in closer detail the 1994 and 1995 surveys to take advantage of their national scope, as well as the special samples gathered in 1994.

A Note on the 1991-1995 Samples

Before the discussion on the theory commences, it is necessary to say a word about the way the 1991 and 1995 samples are being used in this chapter. In order to be able to compare directly the 1991 and 1995 University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project data bases it is first necessary to adjust the two samples so that they cover comparable areas of the country. In 1995, the sample of 1,200 respondents was national in scope, whereas in 1991, resources only allowed for a sample that covered Managua, León, Masaya and Granada. These four cities collectively represent 44.9% of the entire population of Nicaragua according to the preliminary estimates of the 1995 population census (see table in sample weighting section in Chapter 1). When the two samples are reduced to these four cities, the 1991 sample comprises an N of 655, while the 1995

¹Some of the background discussion in this chapter, on which the theoretical and measurement material is based, is drawn in part, from Mitchell A. Seligson, "Democracy in Central America: Deepening, Eroding or Stagnating?" In Kurt von Mettenheim and James M. Malloy, eds., *Deepening Democracy and Representation in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming.

sample includes 623 cases. It is those cases, 1,278 in total, that are analyzed in the comparison of the 1991 and 1995 samples. By focusing on these cities alone, it is possible to draw conclusions that cover a bit less than half of the entire population of the country. The population to which the report refers in this section, however, is exclusively urban and thus should not be taken to represent the opinions of rural Nicaraguans. Furthermore, since the comparisons 1991/95 do not make generalizations to the population of the country as a whole, I will not weight the samples. The division of the two samples is shown in the table below. Fortunately, the sample sizes are nearly identical, which makes comparison straightforward from a statistical point of view. The only notable difference is that the sample size of Managua in 1991 is somewhat larger than that of 1995. In the analysis presented in this section, however, the two samples will be treated as a single block, with no attempt to distinguish among the cities.

Table 2.1. Comparable 1991/95 Sample Ns

City	1991 Sample	1995 Sample
Managua	517	435
León	55	88
Granada	40	40
Masaya	43	60
Totals	655	623

Political Tolerance

Nicaragua does not have a good record in tolerating political dissent. Many observers point to the Somoza period, but during the Sandinista rule repression of dissent was also practiced. At one time or another during the past few decades, opposition groups, including labor movements, peasant movements, students, political parties and church-based organizations, were all attacked and suppressed by the authorities.

It is the first task of this chapter to explore the nature of political tolerance in Nicaragua. The study is based on prior empirical work conducted by political scientists. The quantitative study of political tolerance has its roots in research by Stouffer and McClosky of U.S. respondents' willingness to extend civil rights to proponents of unpopular

causes.² Sullivan, Pierson and Marcus argue that tolerance is a critical element in democratic political culture because intolerant attitudes eventually can produce intolerant behavior that may victimize the targets of intolerance. They have extended the research beyond the U.S. to several other countries.³ Work in Israel and Costa Rica has been conducted by Seligson and Caspi.⁴

Political tolerance has been measured in many studies by determining how willing individuals may be to extend civil liberties to specific groups. In some cases, such as the Stouffer studies, the groups are chosen by the investigator. In others, lists of groups are presented, and the respondent selects his/her "least liked group."⁵ It now appears, however, that both methods produce highly similar results.⁶ Unfortunately, if large portions of the respondents do not identify a group they like the least, the method breaks down. The Gallup survey of Nicaragua utilized the "least liked group" method, but also included some additional measures of tolerance that will be used later in this chapter. The University of Pittsburgh study measured tolerance by focusing on four of the most basic civil liberties: the right to vote, demonstrate, run for office and the right of free speech. We utilized a 10-point response format, that ranged from strongly approve to strongly disapprove, and asked the following questions (question numbers refer to the questionnaire items):

²Samuel A. Stouffer. *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*. New York: Doubleday, 1955; Herbert McClosky "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics." *American Political Science Review*, 1964, 58:361-382; Herbert McClosky and Alida Brill *Dimensions of Tolerance: What Americans Believe about Civil Liberties*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983; Herbert McClosky and Dennis Chong, *The Learning of Civil Libertarian Norms Among Elites and the Mass Public*. Berkeley: University of California Survey Research Center, Working Paper Series No. 35, 1980.

³John L. Sullivan, James Pierson and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982; John L. Sullivan, Michal Shamir, Patrick Walsh, and Nigel S. Roberts *Political Tolerance in Context: Support for Unpopular Minorities in Israel, New Zealand, and the United States*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1985.

⁴Mitchell A. Seligson and Dan Caspi "Arabs in Israel: Political Tolerance and Ethnic Conflict." *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 19 (February, 1983):55-66.

⁵John L. Sullivan, James E. Pierson, and George E. Marcus, "An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance: Illusory Increases, 1950s-1970s," *American Political Science Review* 73 (September 1979):781-794.

⁶James L. Gibson, "Alternative Measures of Political Tolerance: Must Tolerance Be 'Least-Liked?'" *American Journal of Political Science*, May, 1992, vol 36, pp. 560-577.

There are people who only say bad things about the Nicaraguan form of government. How strongly (on a 1-10 scale) would you approve or disapprove of the right of those people to:

- D1. Vote?
- D2. Hold a peaceful demonstration to express their point of view?
- D3. Run for office?
- D4. Make a speech on T. V.?

In order to make the results easier to understand and compare to the other data presented in this report, the scale has been transformed to range from a low of zero to a high of 100. The results are contained in Figure 2.1 below. For the first two of the four variables that comprise the tolerance scale (D1 and D2), between 1991 and 1995 no statistically significant ($<.05$ or less) increases in tolerance were detected. On the "run for office" item (D3) there is a significant increase (sig. $<.001$). This item I consider to be the single most important one in the series because if individuals who oppose the incumbent administration are not allowed to run for office, there can be no opportunity for a democratic rotation of political power. On the final item in the series (D4), measuring freedom of expression, there was also a significant change (sig. = $.05$) but the difference is smaller than with the vote item. Thus, there is some indication of a trend in the direction of greater tolerance since 1991, but the significant increases are limited to only one-half the items, and the magnitude of the change is not very great. Even with increased tolerance in 1995, less than a majority of Nicaraguans would allow critics of the system to run for office. If democracy can be defined as the institutionalization of uncertainty, then a majority of Nicaraguans do not support a basic principal of democratic rule.

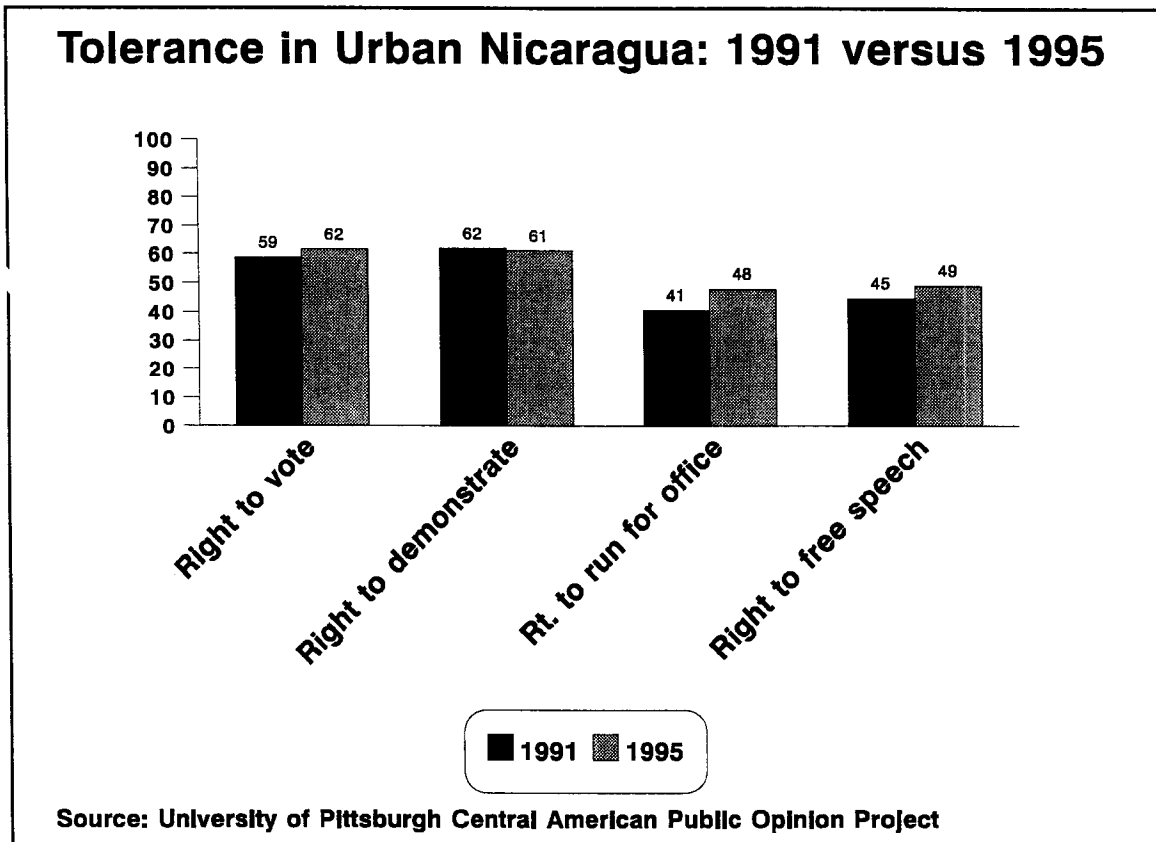


Figure 2.1

In order to better grasp the significance of the data just presented, it is helpful to place the Nicaragua case in comparative perspective. In 1991 the University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project asked these same questions of random samples of Central American citizens in each of the capital cities and surrounding metropolitan areas.⁷ In Figure 2.2 below, the four tolerance items for each of the six Spanish-speaking Central American countries are displayed, along with the 1991 and 1995 results for Nicaragua. The Nicaragua bars are easy to distinguish from the others: 1991 is displayed in solid black and 1995 in solid white. Several points emerge from examining Figure 2.2.

First, levels of tolerance in Nicaragua are intermediate in Central America. For each item Nicaragua's levels are far higher than Guatemala, the country that is almost always the lowest in the region, are on a par with the levels found in Costa Rica, but are lower than the levels found in Honduras and Panama. Second, the change between 1991 and 1995 in comparative terms is rather small, generally maintaining Nicaragua's position relative to

⁷In Honduras, the survey covered both Tegucigalpa, the national capital, and San Pedro Sula, the major industrial city of the country.

the other countries. Third, examining the absolute levels of tolerance, for all countries the "run for office" item is the most "difficult," in the sense that it is the item on which more Central Americans express intolerant views than any other. In Guatemala, for example, the average tolerance score on the scale of 0-100 is only 31 for those willing to allow those critical of the system to run for office. Only in two countries, Honduras and Panama, is there majoritarian support for this dimension of political tolerance. It would be fair to conclude that both in 1991 and 1995, Nicaraguans in Managua and the other major cities covered in the sample being analyzed were neither particularly tolerant nor intolerant.

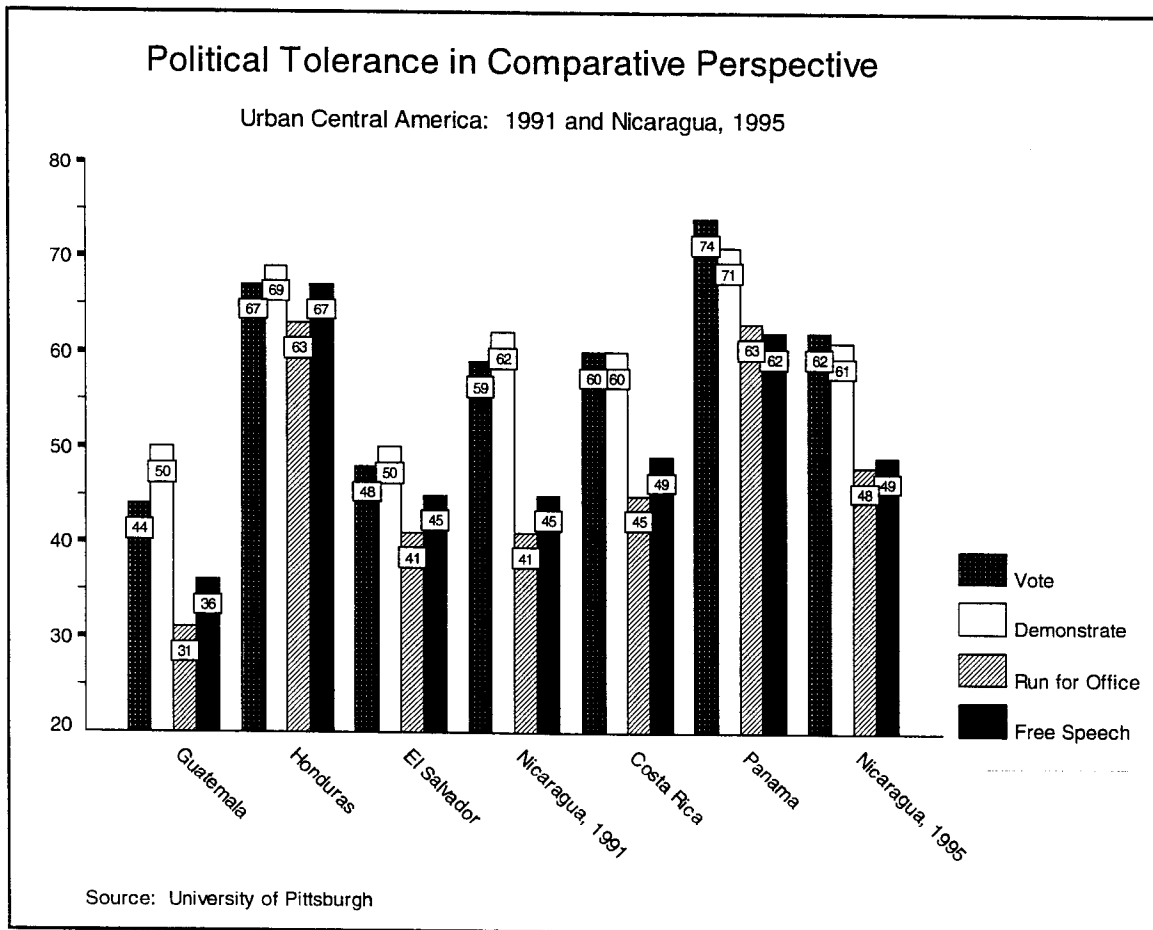


Figure 2.2

System Support

System stability has long been thought to be directly linked to popular perceptions of the legitimacy of the system. Illegitimate systems, ones that do not have the support of the populace, can only endure over the long haul through the use of repression. When repression no longer can be used effectively, or if opposition elements are willing to risk

even extremely grave sanctions, illegitimate regimes will eventually fall. Hence, the failure of the Tienmen Square protestors to bring about changes in the Chinese system can be attributed to either of two causes: (1) the level of coercion that the state was willing to apply exceeded the willingness of the protestors and their supporters to bear it; or (2) system legitimacy was greater among the mass public than it appeared from observing the protestors alone. In contrast, the rapid demise of the communist governments of Eastern Europe suggests rather strongly that once repressive forces are weakened (in this case by the removal of the threat of Soviet intervention on behalf of those governments), illegitimate regimes quickly crumble.

But what of democratic systems? Since almost all of Latin America today is democratic (in structure at least), we want to know what forces have, in the past, been responsible for their downfall. In most cases, military coups have been the main actors responsible. Certainly this has been the case in the vast majority of democratic breakdowns in Latin America. Democratic systems, in contrast, provide a wide variety of mechanisms for the popular expression of discontent and obstacles to the widespread use of official repression. In democracies, therefore, when citizens are discontented with government performance they tend to wait until the next election to seek a change in incumbents. There are, however, some instances in which popular sentiment seems to have been at least partly responsible for democratic breakdowns. The best known case is the demise of the Weimar Republic, where the voters made their choice. In Latin America, the Fujimori "auto-golpe," which extinguished democratic rule in Peru in 1992, emerged out of a popular revulsion over the inability of the extant democratic system to deal effectively with Sendero Luminoso terrorism. According to several reports, despite the use of undemocratic means, President Alberto K. Fujimori was among the most popular heads of state in all of Latin America, and was reelected when he ran for office.⁸ Similarly, the repeated attempts to overthrow the elected government of Venezuela have been supported, according to the polls, by many of its citizens. In the main, however, while authoritarian regimes survive based on some combination of legitimacy and repression, democracies tend to rely primarily on legitimacy.⁹

According to Lipset's classical work, systems that are legitimate survive even in the face of difficult times. In Central America, by the mid 1980s all six countries were regularly holding free and fair elections.¹⁰ The survival of these democracies, each of which are

⁸James Brooke, "Fujimori Sees a Peaceful, and a Prosperous, Peru," *New York Times*, April 6, 1993, A3. According to the article, Fujimori's approval ratings are between 62 and 67 percent.

⁹This is not to say that democracies do not use coercion, but that its use is limited.

¹⁰Participation by leftist parties was highly restricted in El Salvador up until the peace accords implemented in 1992-93. In Guatemala such participation still remains restricted. For details see Seligson, Mitchell A., and John A. Booth. 1995. *Elections and Democracy in Central America, Revisited*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

- B1. To what degree do you believe that the courts in Nicaragua guarantee a fair trial?
- B2. To what degree do you have respect for the political institutions of Nicaragua?
- B3. To what degree do you think that the basic rights of citizens are well protected by the Nicaraguan political system?
- B4. To what degree do you feel proud to live under the political system of Nicaragua?
- B6. To what degree do you feel that one ought to support the political system of Nicaragua?
- B11. To what degree do you trust the Central Election Board?
- B12. To what degree do you trust the Armed Forces?
- B13. To what degree do you trust the Legislative Assembly?
- B14. To what degree do you trust the incumbent¹⁶ administration?

Figure 2.2 below presents the results of the comparison of the 1991 sample with the 1995 sample. As can be seen, there is a very clear pattern in the direction of change. In each of the nine system support items, there is a statistically significant decline (.001 or better). The largest drop is on the last item, the one measuring support for the incumbent government, but each of the items suffered substantial declines in support from the Nicaraguan population. Another way of looking at these data is that in 1991, seven of the nine measures received a score above the midpoint of 50, and the two that fell below it were only fractionally lower (score of 47). By 1995, however, only two of the items (institutions and the electoral tribunal) scored at or above the midpoint. This means that the average Nicaraguan in the sample was located on the negative end of the system support continuum by 1995, having shifted from the positive end in 1991.

¹⁶In Spanish, the word "el Gobierno" is used, which in English directly translates to "the government." But in Latin America, the term is more clearly translated as the incumbent administration rather than the system of government which the direct translation implies.

facing very difficult economic times, depends upon continued popular support. One need only think of the ballot box ouster in 1990 of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, to see how critical such support can be. In that case, the inability of the system to cope effectively with the severe economic crisis and the protracted Contra war, caused voters to turn against the system.¹¹

Until recently, efforts to measure legitimacy have been hampered by reliance on the Trust in Government scale devised by the University of Michigan.¹² That scale, it has turned out, relied too heavily on a measurement of dissatisfaction with the performance of incumbents rather than of generalized dissatisfaction with the system of government. The development of the Political-Support Alienation Scale, now tested in studies of Germany, Israel, the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru and elsewhere, has provided a much more powerful analytical tool for measuring legitimacy.¹³ The scale has been shown to be reliable and valid. It is based upon a distinction made by Easton, relying upon Parsons, of defining legitimacy in terms of system support (i.e., diffuse support) vs. specific support (i.e., support for incumbents)¹⁴. In this work, we refer to the scale as measuring system support, or political support. The two terms are used interchangeably.

Five items were included in the original scale utilized in Central America. For the Nicaragua study, the scale was expanded to include a range of additional items. Although the responses for all items in the series are included in Figure 2.3 in this report, the focus on the basic five.¹⁵ Each item utilized a seven-point response format, ranging from "not at all" to "a great deal." The questions were as follows (with the item numbers referring to the questionnaire):

¹¹See Vanessa Castro and Gary Prevost, *The 1990 Elections in Nicaragua and their Aftermath*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992. Since the ouster of the Sandinistas involved a dramatic shift in the entire system of government, from socialist to capitalist, from Soviet/Cuban alignment to realignment with the U.S., it is appropriate to think of this election as having changed the system rather than merely the personnel of government.

¹²Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government," *American Political Science Review* 68 (September 1974):951-972

¹³For a review of this evidence see Mitchell A. Seligson, "On the Measurement of Diffuse Support: Some Evidence from Mexico," *Social Indicators Research* 12 (January 1983):1-24, and Edward N. Muller, Thomas O. Jukam and Mitchell A. Seligson "Diffuse Political Support and Antisystem Political Behavior: A Comparative Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (May 1982): 240-264. The present discussion draws on that evidence.

¹⁴David Easton, "A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support," *British Journal of Political Science* 5 (October 1975):435-457; Talcott Parsons, "Some Highlights of the General Theory of Action," in Roland A. Young, ed. *Approaches to the Study of Politics*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1958).

¹⁵Readers should note that in other presentation of this scale, a different number of items may have been used and thus the results would vary somewhat from those presented here.

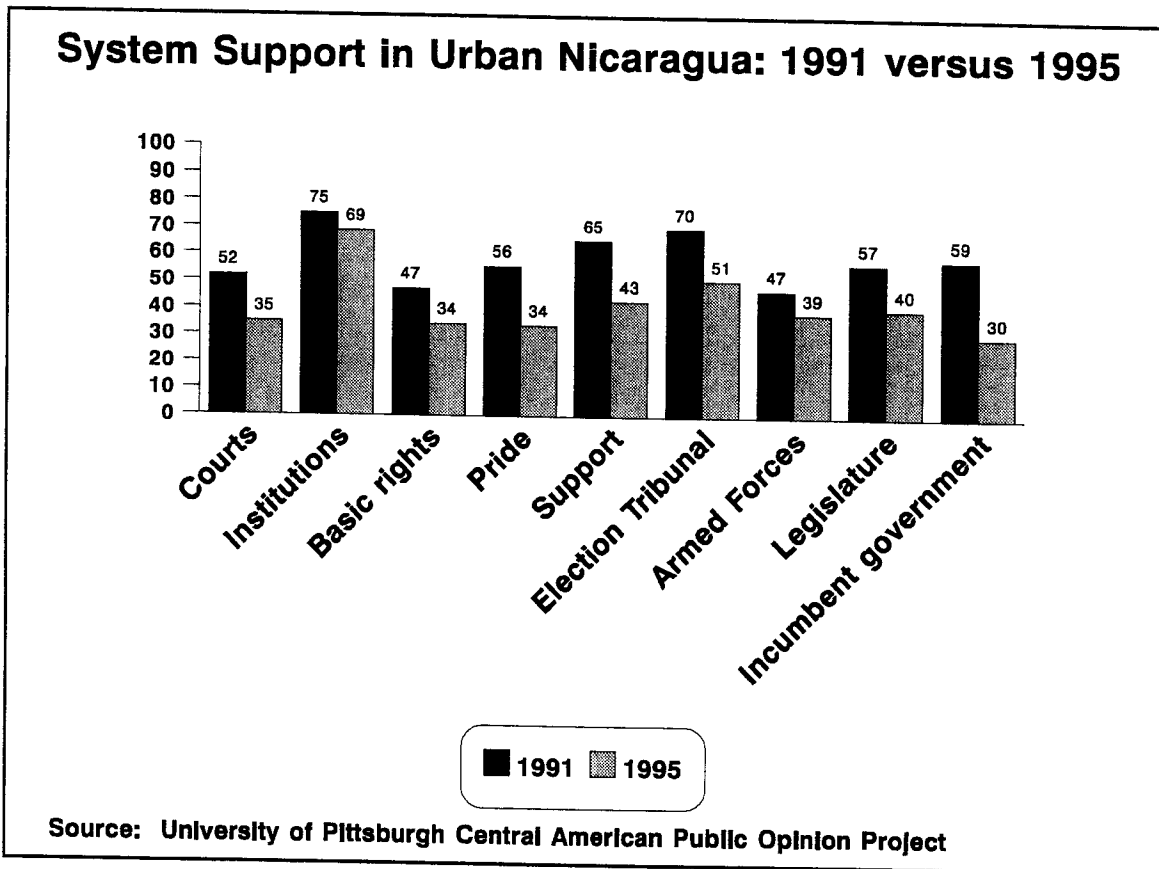


Figure 2.3

It is once again important to put these figures into comparative perspective. One question that arises is that the 1991 level of support may be unusually high since the elections had only recently taken place and there might have been an unusually positive view of the democratic government and system that was in the process of being put in place. If that were the case, then the 1995 levels might be nothing more than a return to the "normal" levels of system support after the "high" of the election had worn off. There are persuasive reasons, however, to reject that line of reasoning. First, extensive use of the system support scale shows that it is not highly sensitive to short term forces.¹⁷ The question on incumbent performance is the exception; presidential popularity is highly volatile in all countries. It is for this reason that this item is excluded when scales of system support are constructed below. But on the other items, which measure basic trust and pride in the institutions of government, public views tend to be slow to change.

¹⁷An extensive study of system support in Costa Rica demonstrated that even though the economy collapsed in 1981, little impact was felt in system support. See Seligson, Mitchell A., and Edward N. Muller. 1987. "Democratic Stability and Economic Crisis: Costa Rica, 1978-1983." *International Studies Quarterly* 31 (September): 301-326.

Second, although there are no precisely comparable items for Nicaragua for the years prior to the 1991 survey, there is an urban survey taken in 1989, six months before the election, in which the "pride in system" item was asked. In that study, 70.8% of the respondents said that they were proud of the Nicaraguan system, a figure twice the levels encountered in 1995.

The third piece of evidence suggesting that the 1995 levels of system support represent a real decline is obtained by comparing the Nicaragua 1991 levels with the other countries in the region. The items shown represent the core items that comprise the system support scale and are the ones that are directly comparable in the 1991 and 1995 data sets. Excluded from this scale are the items that measure support for the incumbent administration since, as noted, opinions on the incumbents are far more volatile than they are for opinions on the system itself. In the case of Nicaragua, if the incumbent item were included, the results might well overstate the extent of support in 1991 and understate the support for 1995. Moreover, dissatisfaction with an incumbent in a democratic system (where rotation in office is the normal expectation) is far less likely to be the source of revolutionary impulses on the part of the mass public compared to a belief in the illegitimacy of the basic institutions of government. Also excluded were the three items that measured support for the electoral tribunal, armed forces and the legislative assembly because these items were not included in the 1991 study. The reader should again focus on the white and black bars in the figure, which represent Nicaragua in 1991 and 1995 respectively. Several points stand out. First, on the items measuring "pride" and "support," Costa Ricans register far higher system support than any other country in the region, and indeed this is higher than all of the other items in the scale. Second, Nicaragua's levels of system support in 1991 were slightly higher on several of the items than the other countries other than Costa Rica, but the differences are not dramatic and in most cases not statistically significant (Duncan post hoc test). This result tends to partially discount the thesis that the 1990 election dramatically altered support levels in the 1991 survey. But the overall impression from the comparisons is that by whatever standard, system support has fallen sharply in Nicaragua. On the "pride" and "support" items, the levels in Nicaragua in 1995 are substantially lower than any Central American country was in 1991. The 1995 El Salvador results are not included here, but the system support levels in that country did not change between 1991 and 1995. Only on one item, "institutions" does Nicaragua still exhibit comparatively high levels of support, exceeding Honduras and Panama (1991), but even on this item, there is a significant drop in support since 1991.

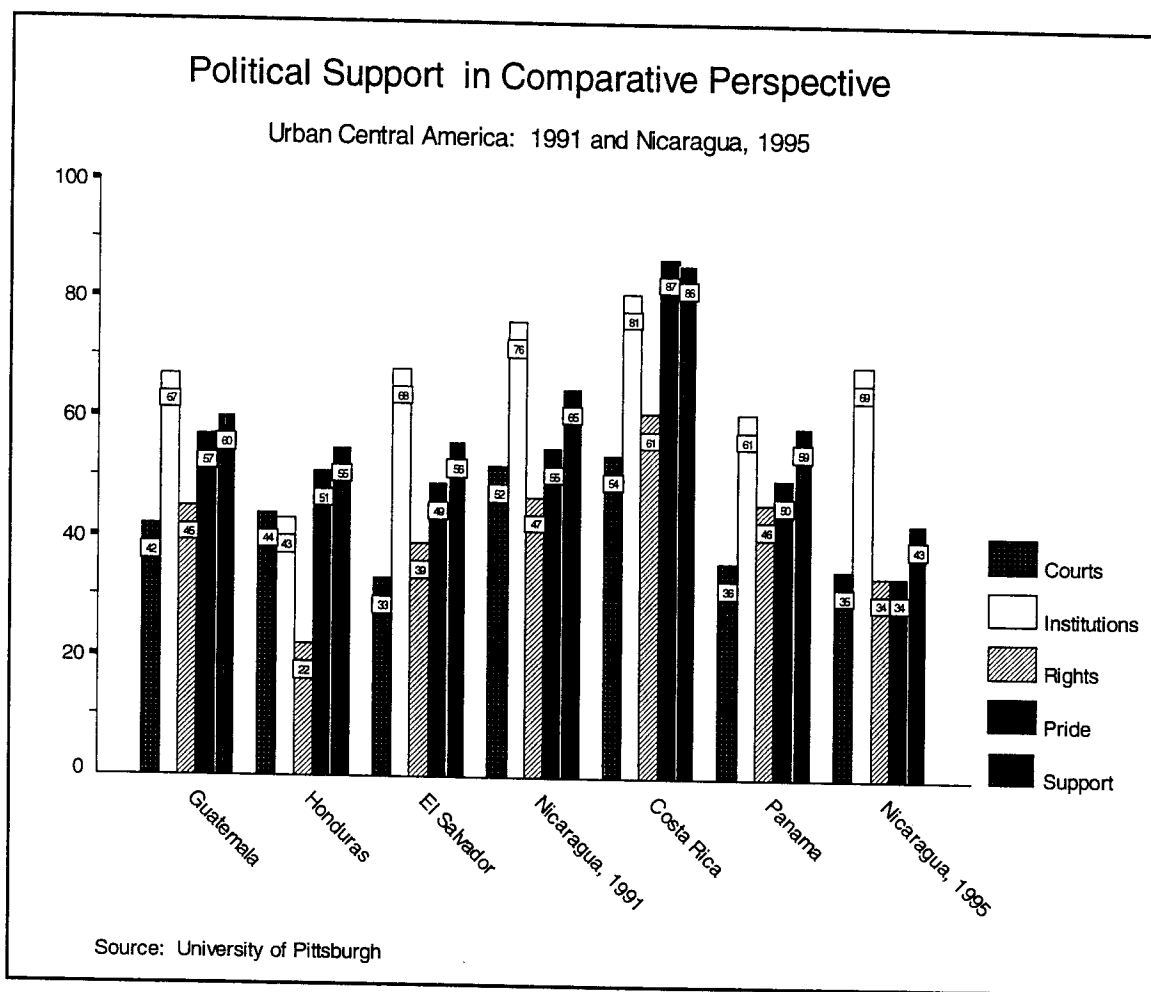


Figure 2.4

Theoretical Interrelationship of Tolerance and System Support

How do tolerance and system support relate, and what impact is there on democratic stability of the different combinations of these two variables?¹⁸ Reducing complexity to the simple, dichotomous case, support can be either high or low, and likewise tolerance can be either high or low. Table 2.2 represents, for this dichotomous situation, all of the theoretically possible combinations of system support and tolerance.

¹⁸This framework was first presented in Mitchell A. Seligson and Ricardo Córdova Macías, *Perspectivas para una democracia estable en El Salvador* (San Salvador: IDELA, 1993).

Table 2.2
Theoretical Relationship Between
Tolerance and System Support
in Institutionally Democratic Polities

		Tolerance	
		High	Low
System support	High	Stable Democracy	Authoritarianism
	Low	Unstable Democracy	Democratic Breakdown

Let us review each cell, one-by-one. Systems that are populated by individuals who have high system support and high political tolerance are those we would predict would be most stable. This prediction is based on the simple logic that high support is needed in non-coercive environments for the system to be stable, and tolerance is needed for the system to remain democratic. Systems with this combination of attitudes are likely to experience deepening of democracy and might eventually end up as one of Dahl's polyarchies.¹⁹

When system support remains high, but tolerance is low, then the system should remain stable (because of the high support), but democratic rule ultimately might be placed in jeopardy. Such systems would tend to move toward authoritarian (oligarchical) rule in which democratic rights would be restricted.

Low support is the situation characterized by the lower two cells in the chart, and should be directly linked to unstable situations. Instability, however, does not necessarily translate into the ultimate reduction of civil liberties, since the instability could serve to force the system to deepen its democracy, especially when the values tend toward political tolerance. One could easily interpret the instability associated with the Martin Luther King years in the United States as ones that led directly to the deepening of democracy in that country. Hence, in the situation of low support and high tolerance, it is difficult to predict if the instability will result in greater democratization or a protracted period of instability

¹⁹Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

characterized perhaps by considerable violence. On the other hand, in situations of low support and low tolerance, democratic breakdown seems to be the obvious eventual outcome. Presumably, over time, the system that would replace it would be autocratic.

It is important to keep in mind two caveats that apply to this scheme. First, note that the relationships discussed here only apply to systems that are already institutionally democratic. That is, they are systems in which competitive, regular elections are held and widespread participation is allowed. These same attitudes in authoritarian systems would have entirely different implications. For example, low system support and high tolerance might produce the breakdown of an authoritarian regime and its replacement by a democracy. Second, the assumption being made is that over the long run, attitudes of the mass public make a difference in regime type. Attitudes and system type may remain incongruent for many years. Indeed, as Seligson and Booth have shown for the case of Nicaragua, that is what may well have occurred. But the Nicaraguan case we studied was one in which the extant system was authoritarian (i.e., Somoza's Nicaragua) and repression had long been used to maintain an authoritarian regime, perhaps in spite of the tolerant attitudes of the citizens.²⁰

Empirical Relationship Between Tolerance and System Support in Nicaragua

It is now time to put together the two variables that have been the focus of our discussion by examining the joint distribution of the two variables. To do this, both variables are dichotomized into "high" and "low." To do this an index of tolerance was created, by summing up the scores each respondent gave for each of the four tolerance items. Since each item ranged from 0 to 100, the total scale ranged from a low of 0 to a high of 400. The scale was divided into high and low at the 200-point. System support is scaled in a similar way, with the five items ranging from 0 to 500, and split at the 250-point to distinguish high and low.

It is important to note that the results presented here differ from those in prior presentations of the University of Pittsburgh Public Opinion Project. In many of those

²⁰Mitchell A. Seligson and John A. Booth, "Political Culture and Regime Type: Evidence from Nicaragua and Costa Rica," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 3, August, 1993, pp. 777-792. A different version appears as "Cultura política y democratización: vías alternas en Nicaragua y Costa Rica." In Carlos Barba Solano, José Luis Barros Horcasitas y Javier Hurtado, *Transiciones a la democracia en Europa y América Latina*. México: FLACSO y Universidad de Guadalajara, 1991, pp. 628-681. Also appears as "Paths to Democracy and the Political Culture of Costa Rica, Mexico and Nicaragua," Larry Diamond, ed., *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, pp. 99-130.

presentations the expanded scale of items was utilized, whereas here the focus is on the core list. As a result, the percentages reported in the following tables vary somewhat from some earlier reports and publications.

The results of this analysis appear in Table 2.3, where it is shown that there was considerable shifting of the population among the four cells. Much of this shift can be directly attributed to the significant decreases (< .001) in system support between 1991 and 1995, offset in minor part by small increases in tolerance. Perhaps the most important change was a large decrease in the stable democracy cell, moving from nearly one-third of the population to less than one-fifth of the population. At the same time, there was a major increase in the democratic breakdown cell, nearly doubling from 17% to 30%. There was a corresponding decline in the authoritarianism cell, down from 36% to 16%. In sum, whereas Nicaraguan citizens were predominantly in the stable cells in 1991, by 1995 they were predominantly in the unstable cells.

Table 2.3.
Empirical Relationship Between
Tolerance and System Support
in Nicaragua, 1991-1995^a

System support		Tolerance			
		High		Low	
High	Stable Democracy		Authoritarianism		
	1991: 29%	1995: 19%	1991: 36%	1995: 16%	
Low	Unstable Democracy		Democratic Breakdown		
	1991: 18%	1995: 35%	1991: 17%	1995: 30%	

^aThese percentages are based on the five core items of the system support scale rather than the nine- and eleven-item series reported on elsewhere.

The data show us a statistically significant increase in the proportion of the residents of the metropolitan areas of Nicaragua who are in the democratic breakdown cell and a corresponding decline in the percentage in the stable democracy cell. In order to translate these statistically significant findings into ones that suggest substantive significance, it is

helpful to put Nicaragua into its regional context. Table 2.4 shows how Nicaragua's shift from 1991 to 1995 changes its position among the Central American countries. In 1991, Nicaragua was ranked third behind Costa Rica and Panama in terms of the proportion of citizens in the stable democracy cell, and had the third lowest proportion in the democratic breakdown cell. By 1995, however, Nicaragua had fallen nearly to the levels of El Salvador and Guatemala, with only a slightly larger proportion of its population in the stable democracy cell than those two countries had in 1991. Moreover, by 1995 the size of the democratic breakdown cell in Nicaragua tied with Guatemala, the largest in all of Central America.

These findings are very discouraging. Nearly one-third of the residents of Managua and other key urban areas of Nicaragua neither support their system nor support key democratic liberties. When compared to Costa Rica, in which only 5% of the urban population has that combination of attitudes, it is clear that Nicaragua has a long way to go until it can enjoy the stable democracy that Costa Rica has experienced.

One positive sign does emerge from the comparison of Nicaragua 1991 with Nicaragua 1995. The size of the authoritarianism cell has diminished considerably while the unstable democracy cell has increased. The increase in the unstable democracy cell in part is a function of the diminished system support, but if this were the only factor at work, then the breakdown cell would have increased even more. What has happened, instead, is that the increase in political tolerance noted above has shifted some Nicaraguans into the position that they are discontent with the political system as it now stands, but rather than desiring the breakdown of democracy, wish an increase in democratic practices. If these individuals, who exhibit increased tolerance, could also develop increased system support, the stable democracy cell could increase substantially in Nicaragua.

Comparison with more recent data sets from other countries is instructive. Although we do not have updated information for all the countries in the region, we are fortunate to have 1995 data for both Costa Rica and El Salvador (see Table 2.4). The Costa Rica results, funded by a survey supported by the University of Pittsburgh²¹ come as no surprise. Democratic stability seems to have remained virtually unchanged, with 46% of the population still in the stable democracy cell, and the breakdown cell actually shrinking from 7% to 5%. In the case of El Salvador, however, new February, 1995 data are available based on a University of Pittsburgh survey supported by USAID.²² As can be seen, in El Salvador the stable democracy cell increased substantially (largely as a result

²¹This study was conducted by Cynthia Chalker of the University of Pittsburgh with support from a grant from the Howard Heinz Endowment to Professor John Booth at the University of North Texas, who received the funding through the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

²²Seligson, Mitchell A., and Ricardo Córdova M. 1995. *El Salvador: De la Guerra a la Paz, Una Cultura Política en Transición*. San Salvador: IDELA, Universidad de Pittsburgh y FUNDAUNGO.

of increasing political tolerance accompanied by stable system support values), while the magnitude of the breakdown cell shrank.

Country	Stable Democracy	Authoritarianism	Unstable Democracy	Democratic Breakdown
Costa Rica, 1990	46%	44%	4%	7%
Costa Rica, 1995	46%	41%	8%	5%
Panama, 1991	31%	16%	38%	15%
Nicaragua, 1991 ^a	29%	36%	18%	17%
Honduras, 1991	27%	5%	45%	23%
El Salvador, 1995	26%	29%	21%	24%
Nicaragua, 1995	19%	16%	35%	30%
El Salvador, 1991	17%	31%	24%	29%
Guatemala, 1991	17%	41%	13%	30%

^aIn other published reports the Nicaragua sample of 1991 was limited to Managua, whereas in this study in which we compare 1991 to 1995, we include metropolitan Leon, Masaya and Granada. For that reason the percentages shown here differ slightly from those in prior reports.

Percents do not always total 100 owing to rounding.

^bThese percentages are based on the five core items of the system support scale rather than the nine- and eleven-item series reported on elsewhere.

Source: University of Pittsburgh Central America Public Opinion Project, 1991-1995

Another way of looking at the data displayed in Table 2.4 is presented in the following bar graph.

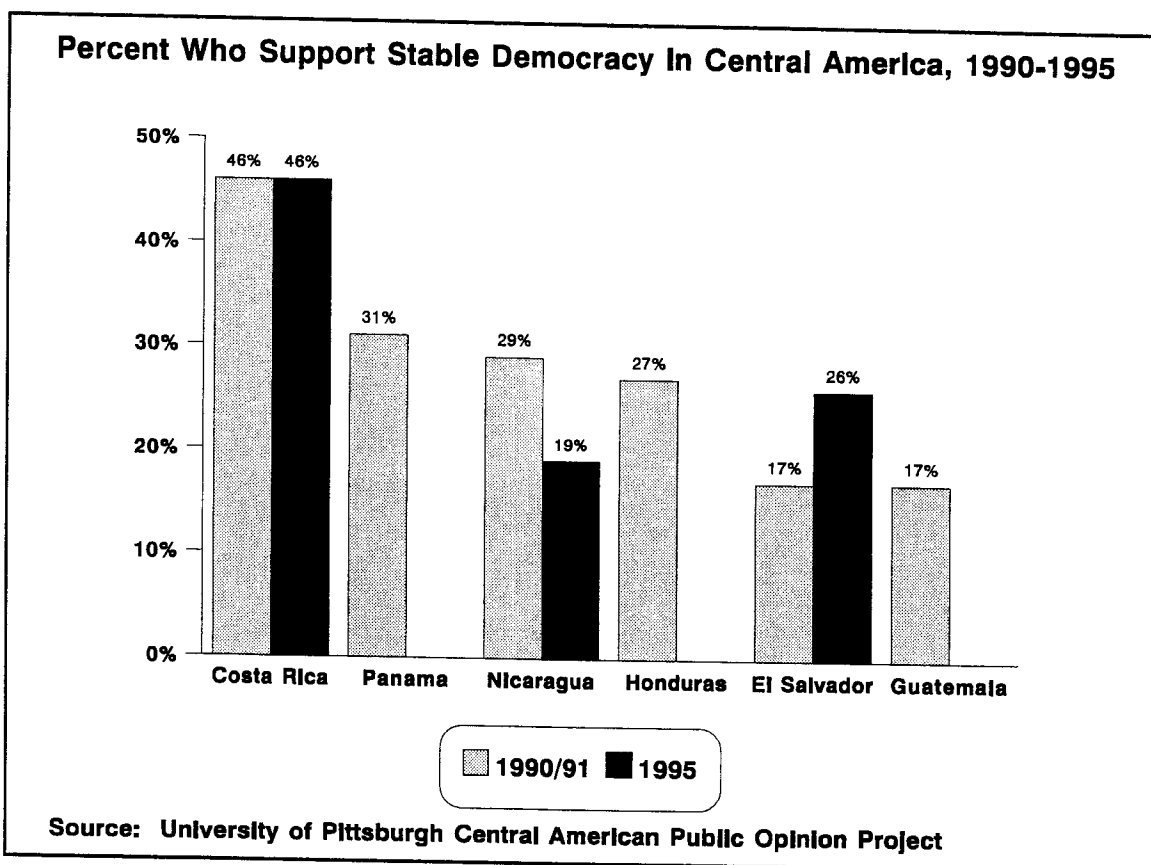


Figure 2.5

Tolerance and System Support: Subsector Comparisons, 1995

Thus far in this chapter attention has been focused on comparing the 1991 sample with that of 1995. Those comparisons, however, are limited by the fact that in 1991 we were only able to obtain data on Metropolitan Managua, León, Granada and Masaya. With a national sample, it is possible to examine various subsectors of the population with the 1995 data to see what patterns emerge. In doing so, I will make use of the indexes developed above of political tolerance and system support. Now, however, rather than dichotomizing the results into low and high, I will use the full range of the two scales, calibrating them on the 0-100 basis used earlier in this discussion to make their interpretation more intuitive.

Political Tolerance

One of the most common findings in research on political tolerance is that it is closely correlated with education; the higher the education, the greater the tolerance. We found that pattern in other Central American countries.²³ Nicaragua fits this pattern, as is shown in Figure 2.6 below, and the difference is statistically significant at $< .01$. The only deviation is that tolerance is higher among those with no education than it is for those with 1-3 years of education. It is difficult to explain this finding and it is one that calls for further exploration.

In attempting to explain the higher level of tolerance among those with the lowest level of education, attention is turned to ideology to look for an "interaction effect" between ideology and education. Nicaragua is a country riven by ideological splits. It is possible that those on the left would be more politically tolerant of the rights of the opposition than the right, at least that is what a number of studies in other countries have shown. In Nicaragua, those with the lowest levels of education were slightly more likely to identify with the left (questionnaire variable SP44), and this might help explain the higher level of tolerance among those individuals.

Gender also plays a role in tolerance. But we must be careful to consider that there is a lower average level of education among females as compared to males in Nicaragua. Males average 6.2 years, compared to females who average 5.9 years. Figure 2.6 shows that even when controlled for education, females are less tolerant than males. For every level of education, except those with no education, males are more tolerant than females.

²³Mitchell A. Seligson and Joel Jutkowitz, *La Cultura Democrática de los Guatemaltecos: Resumen*. Co-authored with Dinorah Azpuru de Cuestas and Max Eudardo Lucas P. Guatemala: ASIES, 1995, pp. 77. See also, "Guatemalan Values and the Prospects for Democratic Development." Co-authored with Joel M. Jutkowitz. Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales, Guatemala (ASIES) and Development Associates, Inc., Rosslyn, VA., March, 1994.

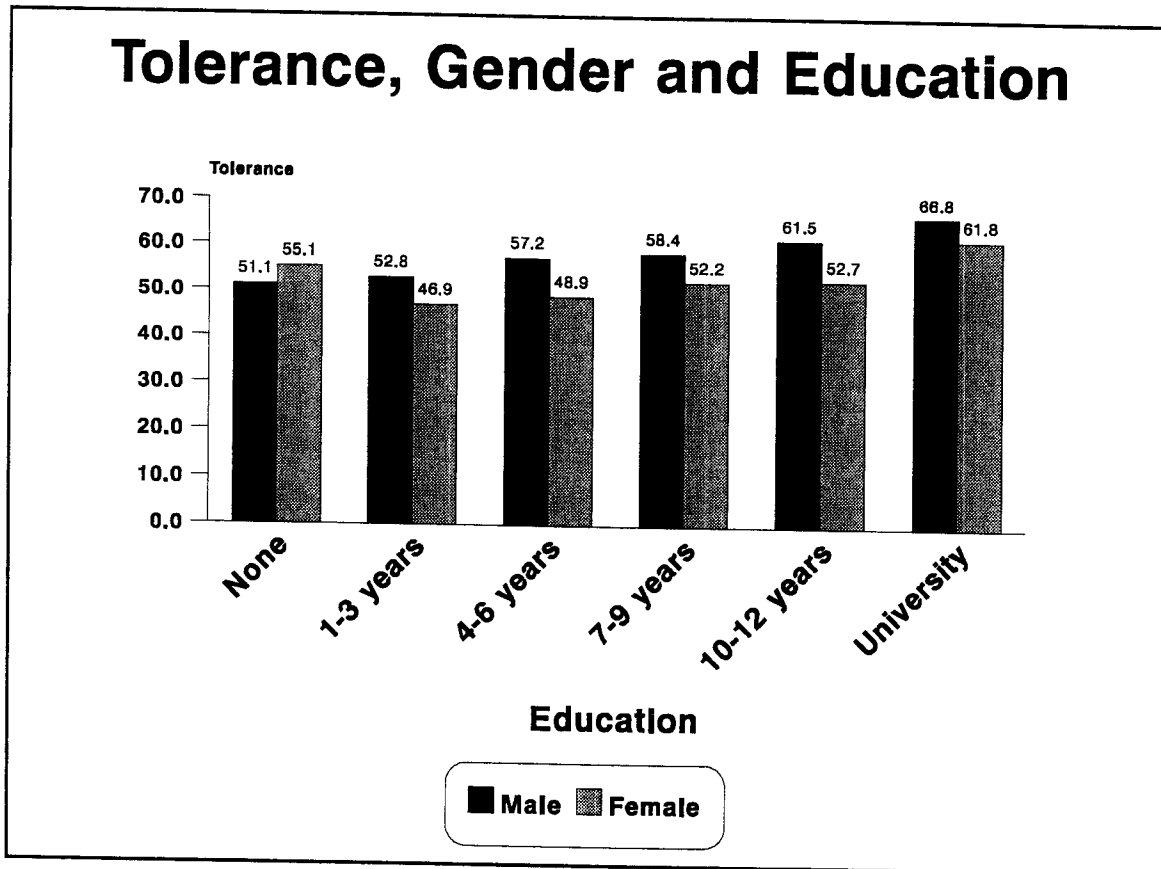


Figure 2.6

System Support

Contrast by Department. System support is not uniform throughout all of Nicaragua. The fundamental political unit of the country is the Department, of which there are 14 included in this study. As noted, Zelaya and Río San Juan were not included in the 1995 IEN survey. In Figure 2.7 below, the level of system support, based on the index of 0-100, is shown for each department in the country. The sample is weighted by department population size. The high support score in Rivas could in part be a function of the personal linkage of the Chamorro family to the region, but more likely a function of somewhat better state of the economy enjoyed there. At the other extreme, Granada has the lowest system support, perhaps a function of the long Conservative tradition of the region and their disillusionment with the system that has emerged since 1990.

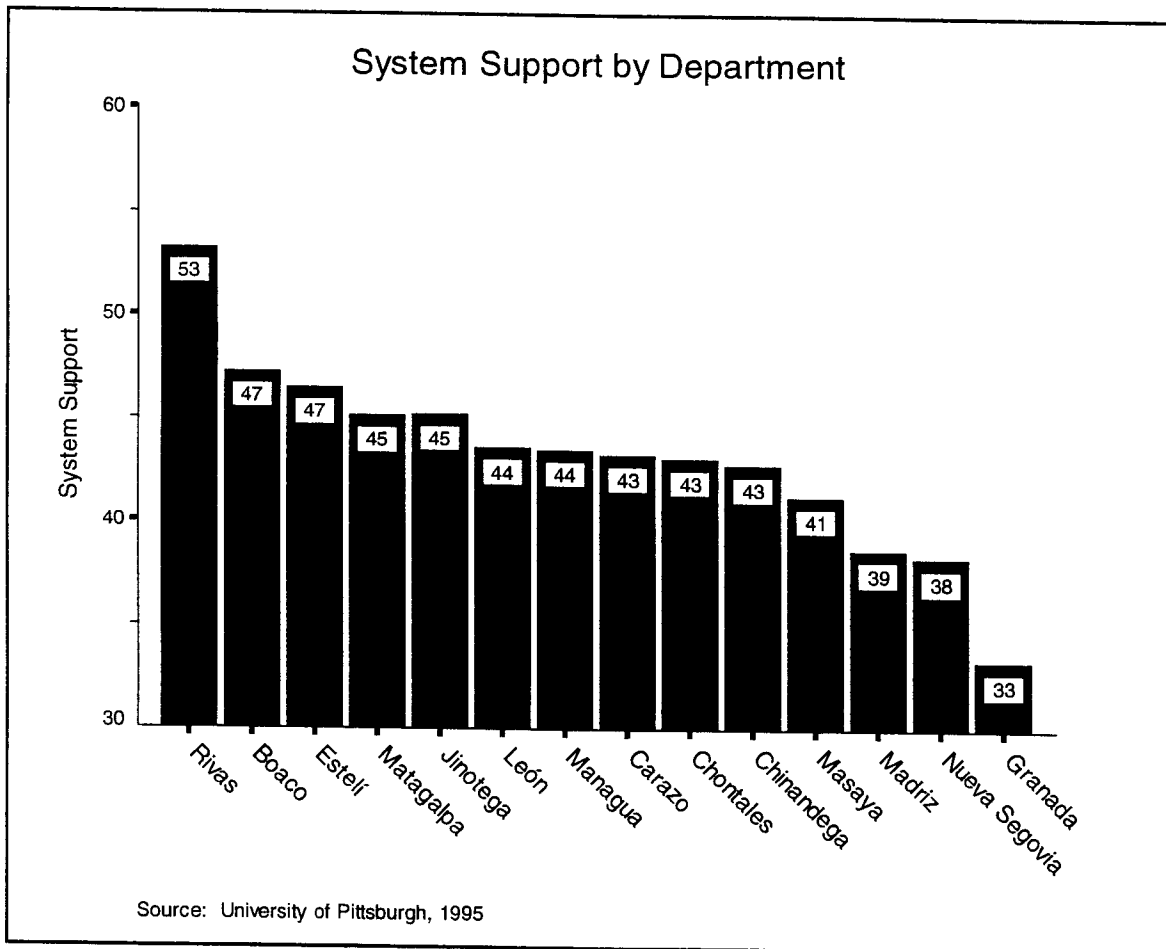
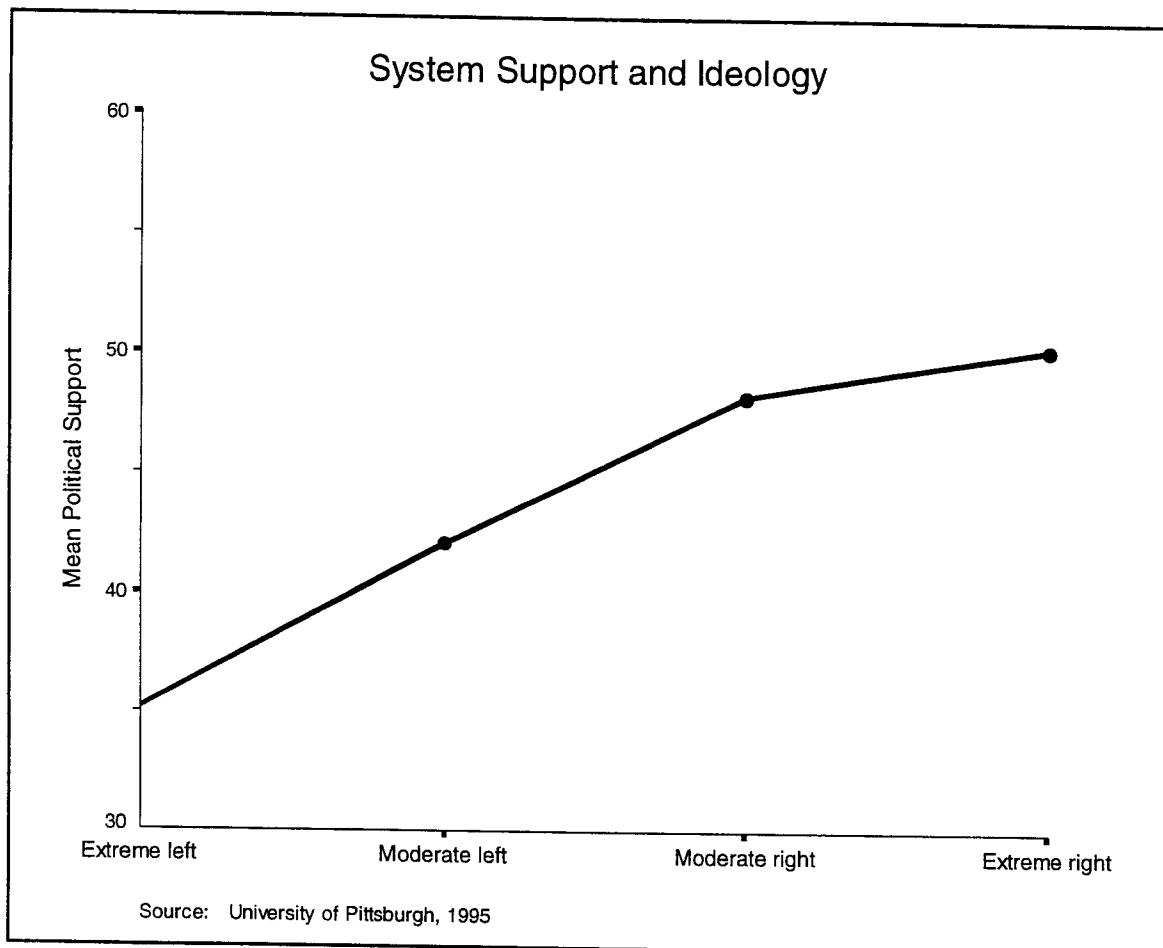


Figure 2.7

The ideologically charged atmosphere in Nicaragua suggests to us the hypothesis that system support is directly linked to ideology. Our hypothesis is that low system support is found among the left, whose party is out of power, while high support is found among the right. Figure 2.8 shows that this is indeed the case. The differences are statistically significant ($< .001$).

**Figure 2.8**

Normally, one would anticipate that higher socio-economic status translates into higher system support. It is to be expected that those individuals within a given country who have risen economically would be the ones most likely to express higher levels of system support.

The survey results in Nicaragua do not support that expectation. A measure of wealth based on ownership of various signs of material wealth (refrigerators, telephones, cars, washing machines, microwave ovens, etc.) was employed. No statistically significant differences based upon wealth emerged.

Differences Among Special Groups and the Mass Public on Tolerance and System Support

Tolerance

Recall that the 1994 Gallup survey provided information about the opinions of several key special groups in Nicaragua. Although the Gallup survey does not contain items that measure tolerance and system support in the same fashion as they do in the University of Pittsburgh surveys, there are a number of similar items. In the Gallup survey, instead of scales that ranged from 1-10, the respondents were asked to select from a scale of 1-4, with each position on the scale representing a schematic drawing of a face that ranged from a broad smile, indicating full agreement to a sour frown, indicating complete disagreement. The tolerance items that were asked which make the closest parallel to the University of Pittsburgh surveys are the following:

I am going to read you some sentences. Please select the face (scores 1-4) that reflects your level of agreement/disagreement with each sentence:

Suppose that the government in power is a government that you support. This government ought to censor newspapers, radio and television stations that criticize the government.

This government that you support ought to prohibit the political parties that criticize its actions.

This government that you support has the right to arrest or jail members of organizations that criticize its actions.

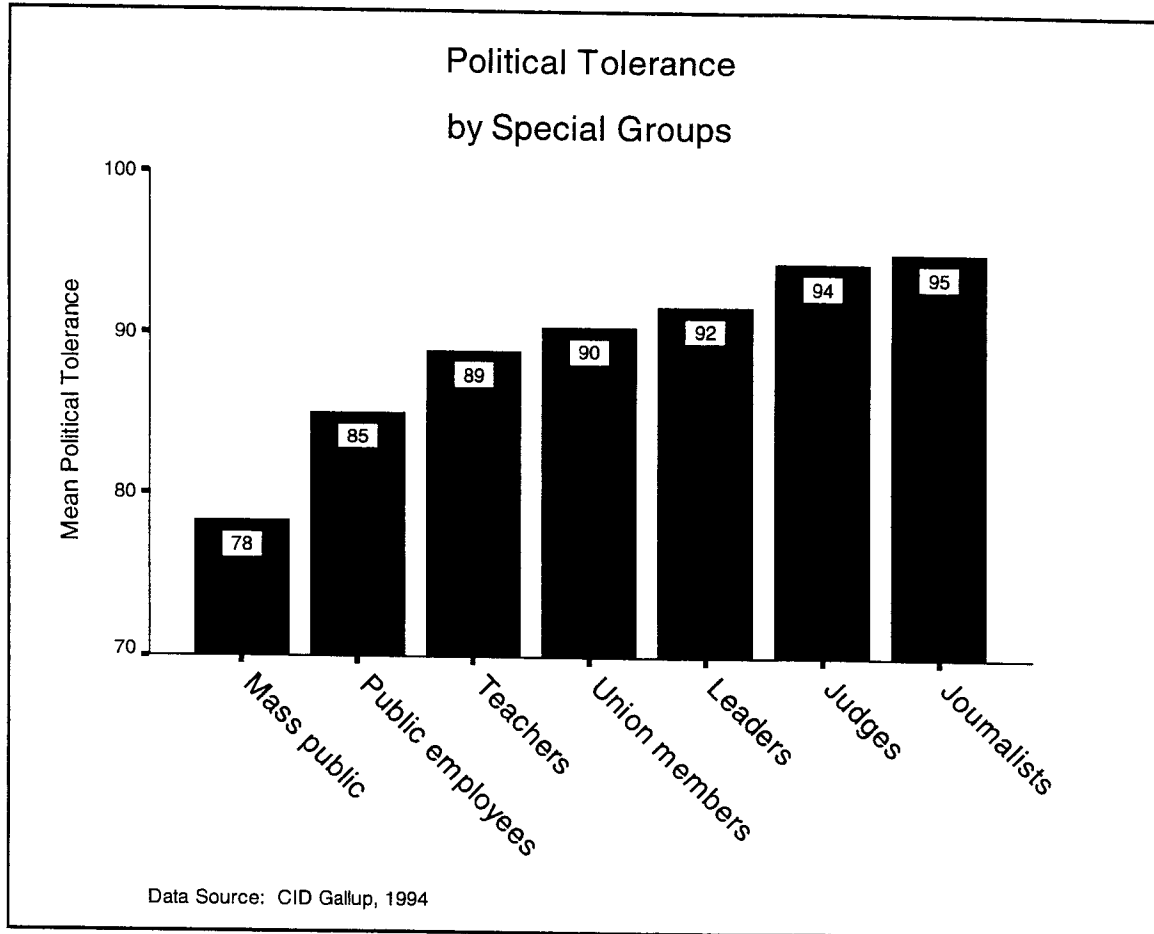
If it is necessary, this government that you support ought to suspend the legislature and govern by decree.

If the military are not satisfied with the government that you support, they have the right to make a coup and govern by decree.

An index of these items was created following the procedures utilized with the 1995 University of Pittsburgh study. The items were converted to a 0-100 format, then summed and recalibrated to once again range from 0-100. In Figure 2.9 the results are displayed. It should be noted that Gallup did not administer this series to the police/military portion of the sample, and hence it is impossible to know how they would have scored in this analysis. It should also be noted that the wording and scoring of the questions seems to

have produced a bias in the direction of unusually high levels of tolerance, far greater than is obtained by the items used in other surveys, including the University of Pittsburgh. Therefore, one should not focus on the absolute levels of tolerance, but on the relative differences among the groups studied here.

The overall impression one gets from this figure is a high level of tolerance. The differences among the groups are notable, however, and statistically significant (ANOVA, $< .001$) with the most obvious difference being the gap between the mass public and the various special groups. The mass public is significantly more intolerant of the rights of unpopular groups than are those of any other group. Within the special groups, there are also marked differences, with judges and journalists being the most tolerant, and public employees and teachers being the least. The comparatively low tolerance scores of the teachers is disturbing for two reasons. First, teachers are more educated than any other group in the sample (as was shown in Chapter 1, figure 1.2), and since tolerance is associated with education in Nicaragua (and elsewhere) one would presume that the teachers would be more tolerant than any other group. Second, since teachers are one of the most important transmission belts for attitudes in any society, probably second only to parents, one would have hoped to find a higher level of tolerance among this group than among others. It is important not to exaggerate this difference, since the scores of the teachers are considerably above the mass public and not that far below the most tolerant group (journalists).

**Figure 2.9**

It has already been shown that education plays a role in determining political tolerance in Nicaragua. Since the various special groups have education levels far above that of the general population, it would be important to control for the effects of education to see what differences remain. This was done by entering education as a covariate in the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result, as expected, was that the differences among the groups diminished, but in only a very small way, leaving undisturbed the basic pattern presented in figure 2.9. That is, the level of tolerance of the mass public, once the impact of its comparatively low level of education is eliminated, increases its tolerance score, but only by one point, to 79. Teachers, on the other hand, see their levels of tolerance decline once their relatively high levels of education is eliminated from their results, but their scores only drop from 89 to 86. Judges and journalists also decline in tolerance with education controlled, but only by two points. Therefore, it is clear that even though education plays an important role in determining tolerance in Nicaragua, its impact is not great enough to alter the basic pattern of differences shown in Figure 2.9. The mass public remains the least tolerant group, with judges and journalists the most tolerant. Ideology, measured on a left-right scale, is also significantly associated with political tolerance, with the left being

more tolerant than the right. Introduced as a covariate in the analysis, it has an impact on the results, but, like education, the basic ordering of the groups does not change.

The Gallup 1994 survey contained a series of items that measured tolerance from a somewhat different perspective. It utilized what is known as the “Least-liked” method of measuring tolerance. This method allows the respondent to select from a range of alternative groups that have been predetermined by the researcher as often being a target of intolerance in a given political setting. The respondent is asked to select from the list the one that is liked the least. The results from the 1994 survey, looking only at the mass sample, are displayed in Figure 2.10. A number of conclusions can be drawn. First, as in many applications of the least-liked group method, a substantial proportion of the population did not select a group. Second, among the mass public of Nicaragua, the Sandinistas were the most frequently chosen as a target of dislike. Third, falling close behind the Sandinistas were the Somocistas and the Re-Contras, the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Finally, communists received nearly 10 percent of the “votes” for the least liked, which if summed with the Sandinistas, means that over one-quarter of those selecting a group chose the left.

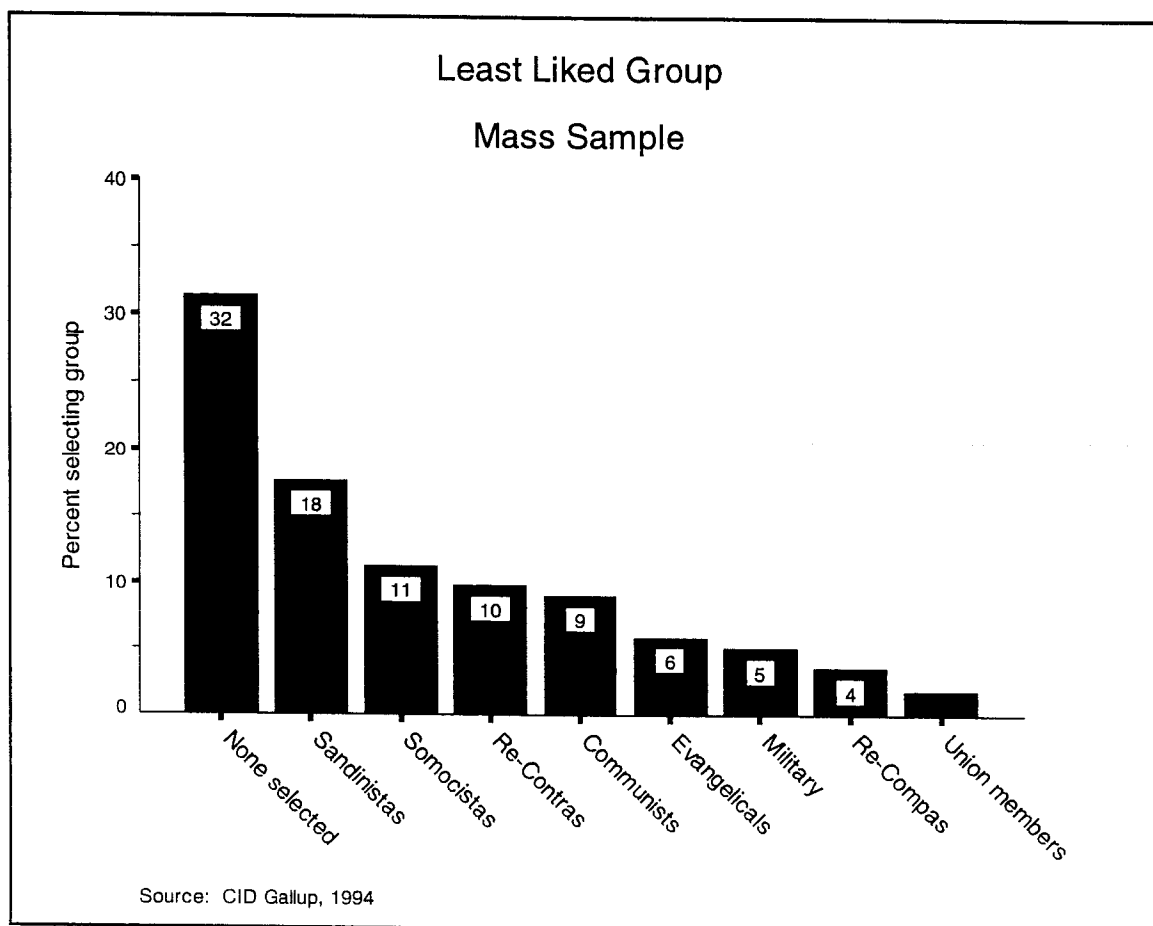


Figure 2.10

The results of the selection of least-liked groups looks somewhat different if those who did not respond are excluded and the percentages are recalculated focusing on only those who did respond to the question. Figure 2.11 contains the results. The relative ordering of the least-liked groups is essentially the same, but with the elimination of those who did not respond, the percentages for each group change considerably. Now the Sandinistas, communists²⁴ and re-compas (remobilized Sandinistas), representing the major groups on the left in Nicaragua, total 44% of the targets of dislike, while the right, comprised of Somocistas and re-contras, total 31%. The other groups are difficult to classify ideologically, and in any event, only total one-quarter of the targets.

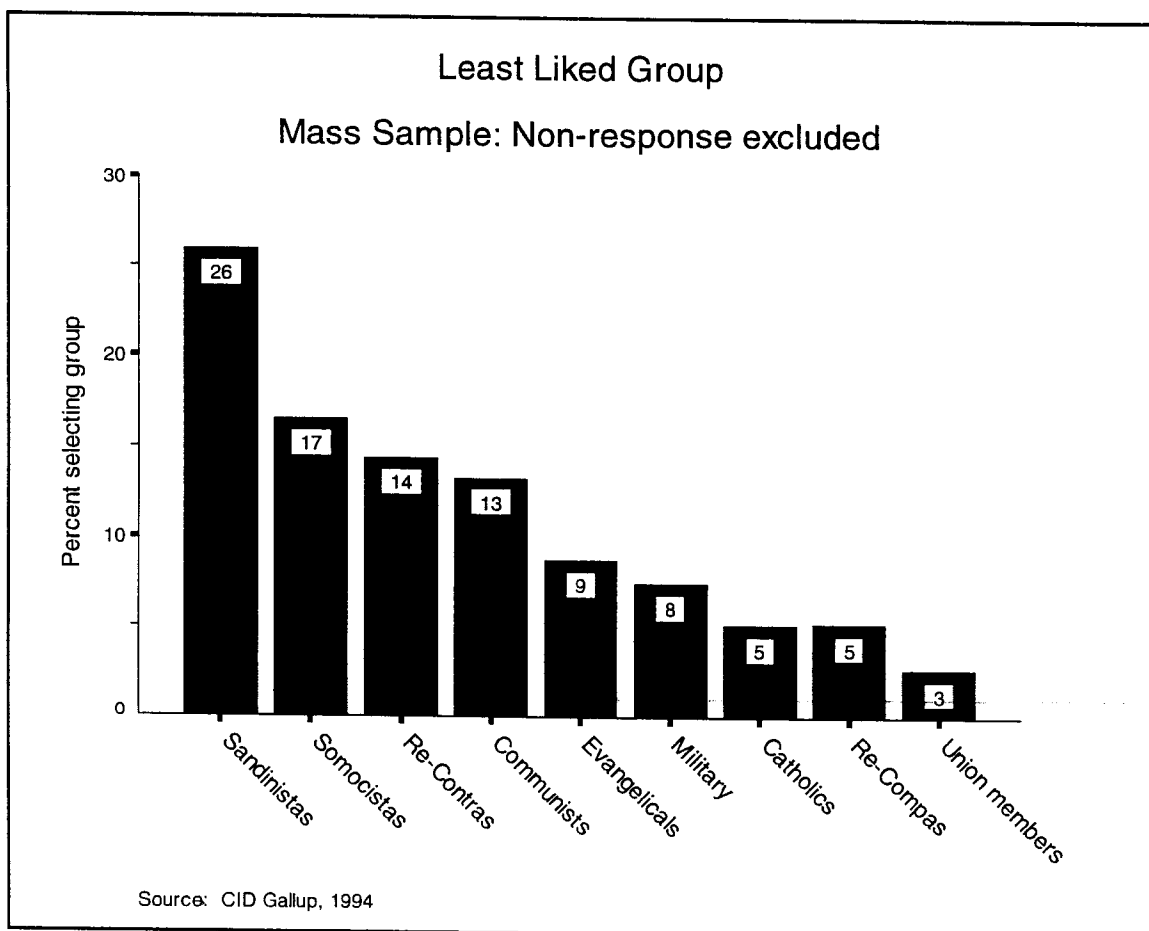


Figure 2.11

A further understanding of the targets of intolerance can be obtained from looking at the geographic distribution of the least liked item. It is necessary to simplify the

²⁴It should be noted that for the 1990 elections, the Communists joined with the UNO coalition, generally considered to be right of Center. That alliance, however, was not long-lived.

groupings, however, in order to be able to examine the attitudes across the 14 departments included in the study. Figure 2.12 contains the results. The overall pattern matches the national pattern in most departments, with the left being more of a target of the least liked group choice than the right. In Estelí and to a greater degree in Madriz, the right is more likely to be a target than the left. Madriz, of course, was a strong point of Sandino support in the 1920s. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that with the important exception of Madriz, the results obtained at the national level are found throughout the nation.

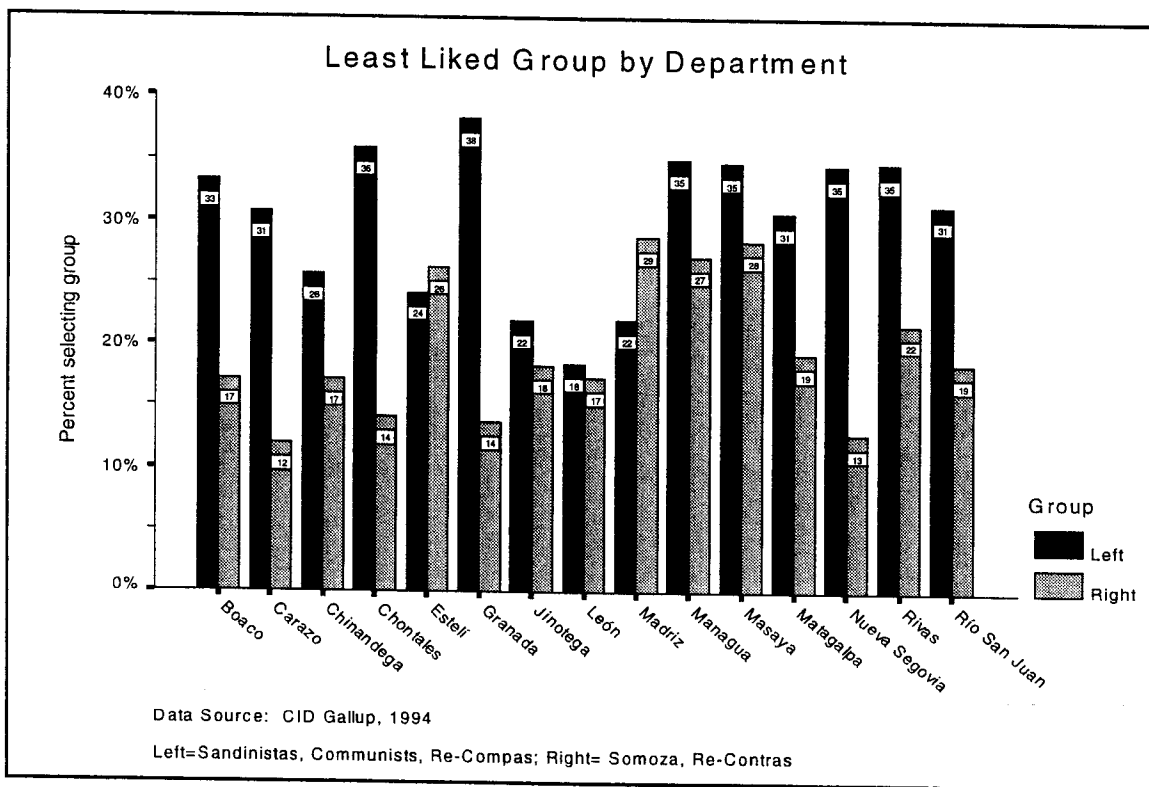


Figure 2.12

It is also possible to examine the targets of the least-liked group question for the special group samples. Figure 2.13 contains the results. What is striking about the choices of least-liked groups of the special groups is how radically different they are than for the mass public. Among the former, the right is the predominant target of dislike for each of the groups except the police/soldiers and, to a lesser extent, public employees. Journalists overwhelmingly selected the right as their least liked group, as did teachers, leaders and judges. What comes as somewhat a surprise is that while union members are more likely to chose the right than the left, nearly a third of the union members selected a group on the left. Although the Sandinistas have had a large influence on the armed

forces, the left is the overwhelming target of these individuals. The special samples, therefore, demonstrate that elites and masses in Nicaragua share very different world views; the masses find the left most objectionable, while the most elite groups find the right as the group to dislike the most.

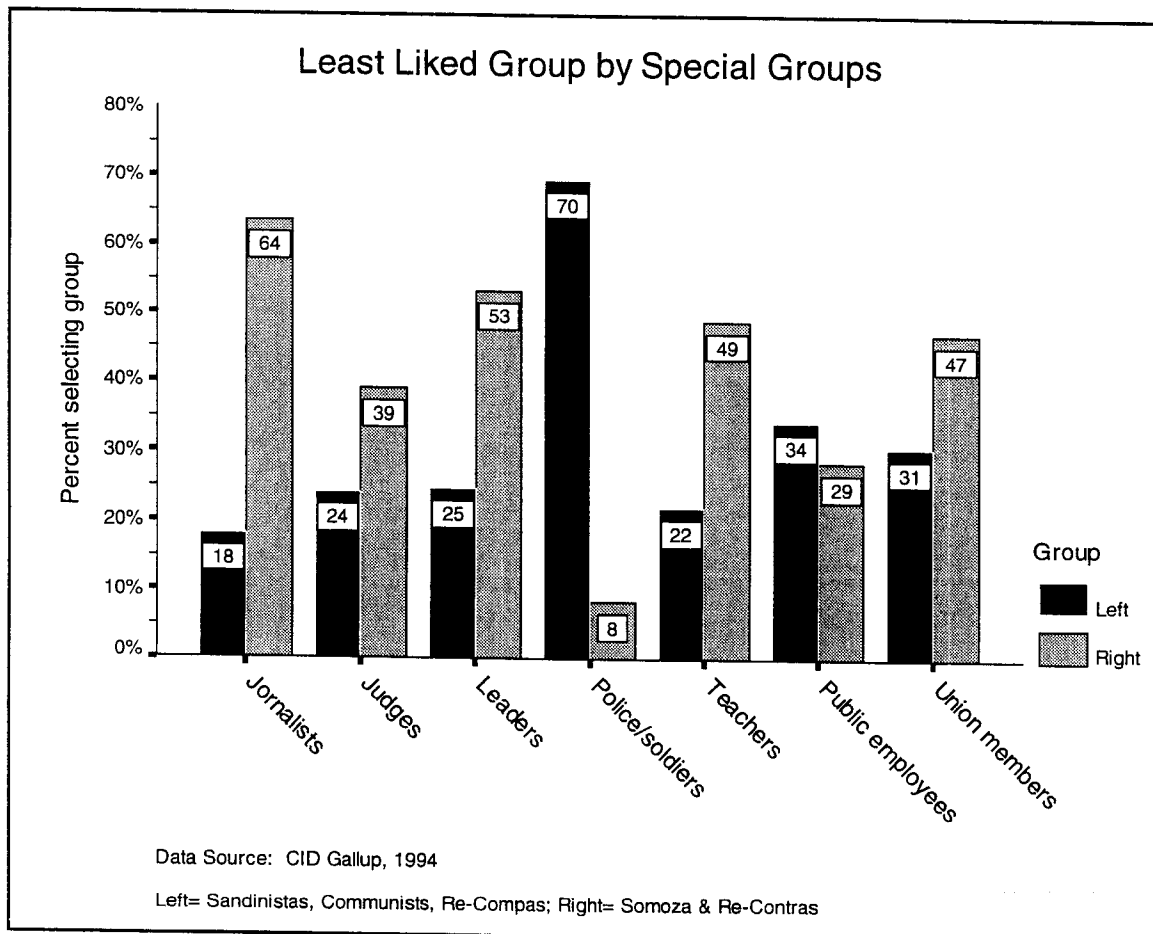


Figure 2.13

Political Support

Political support was also measured in the Gallup survey, with items that are quite similar to those used in the University of Pittsburgh study. The coding scheme, again, was a 1-4 system, and again the happy/sad faces were utilized. Unfortunately, Gallup excluded one item (the one measuring system support) for the public employees, so a scale for this group cannot be constructed that would parallel the others. The items themselves were:

To what extent are you in agreement with the following sentences:

The courts in Nicaragua guarantee a fair trial.

The political system of Nicaragua guarantees the basic rights of citizens.

We should support the Nicaraguan political system.

How proud are you to live under the Nicaraguan system of government?

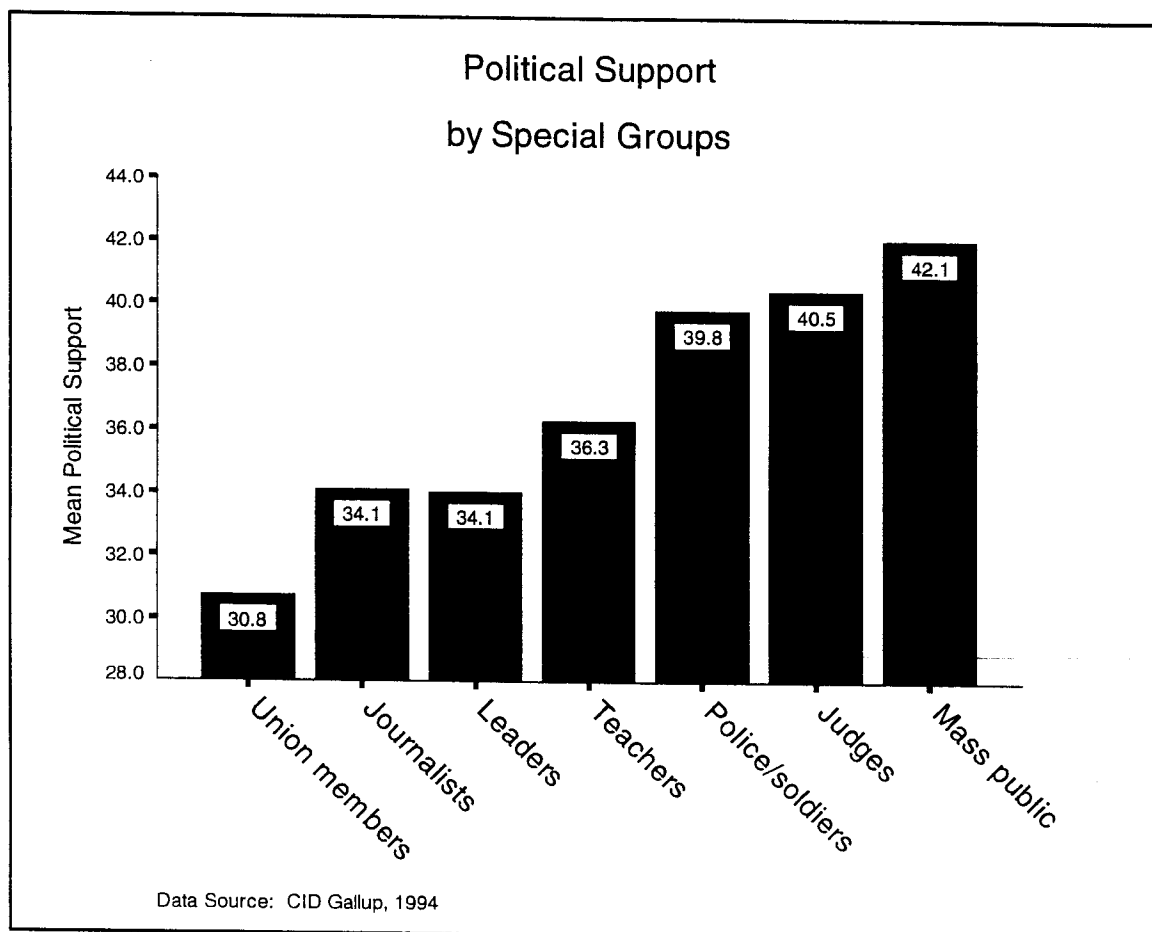


Figure 2.14

The differences in system support for the various groups under study are shown in Figure 2.14. The differences are significant (ANOVA < .001) and extremely interesting from a substantive point of view. The mass public, while the least tolerant politically, is the most supportive of the system, followed by judges and the police/soldier group. Less

supportive were teachers, leaders, journalists. Union members were the least supportive of any group. These differences persist even when attitudes toward the incumbent Chamorro administration are taken into account. When controlled for the respondent's evaluation of the Chamorro government (using this variable as a covariate in the ANOVA analysis), the basic ordering of the groups does not change.

Ideology, as was shown earlier in this chapter, is an important factor in Nicaragua. As can be seen in Figure 2.14, the various groups in Nicaragua can be clearly delineated along ideological grounds. The mass public, as a group, is far to the right of the special groups as a whole, and dramatically further to the right than are the political leaders and journalists. Indeed, the mass public is further to the right than the police and soldier group, a finding that is perhaps unique to Nicaragua, a country in which the Sandinistas for a number of years had a very strong influence over recruitment into these areas of public service. The remainder of the public bureaucracy, however, is much closer to the mass public in its ideological orientation. Gender differences are not great for most of the groups, with males and females having almost identical scores in the mass public. The only important exception is among the journalists, where male journalists are much further to the left than females. It should be kept in mind that these findings for the special samples may be influenced by the non-random nature of the sample selection and it is possible that the views of the population of these groups as a whole might differ from the samples analyzed here.

Ideology was then used as a control to determine if system support among the various groups varied. Although ideology is significantly correlated with system support, with the left being lower than the right, the inclusion of ideology as a control does not alter the basic pattern of findings displayed in figure 2.14 above.

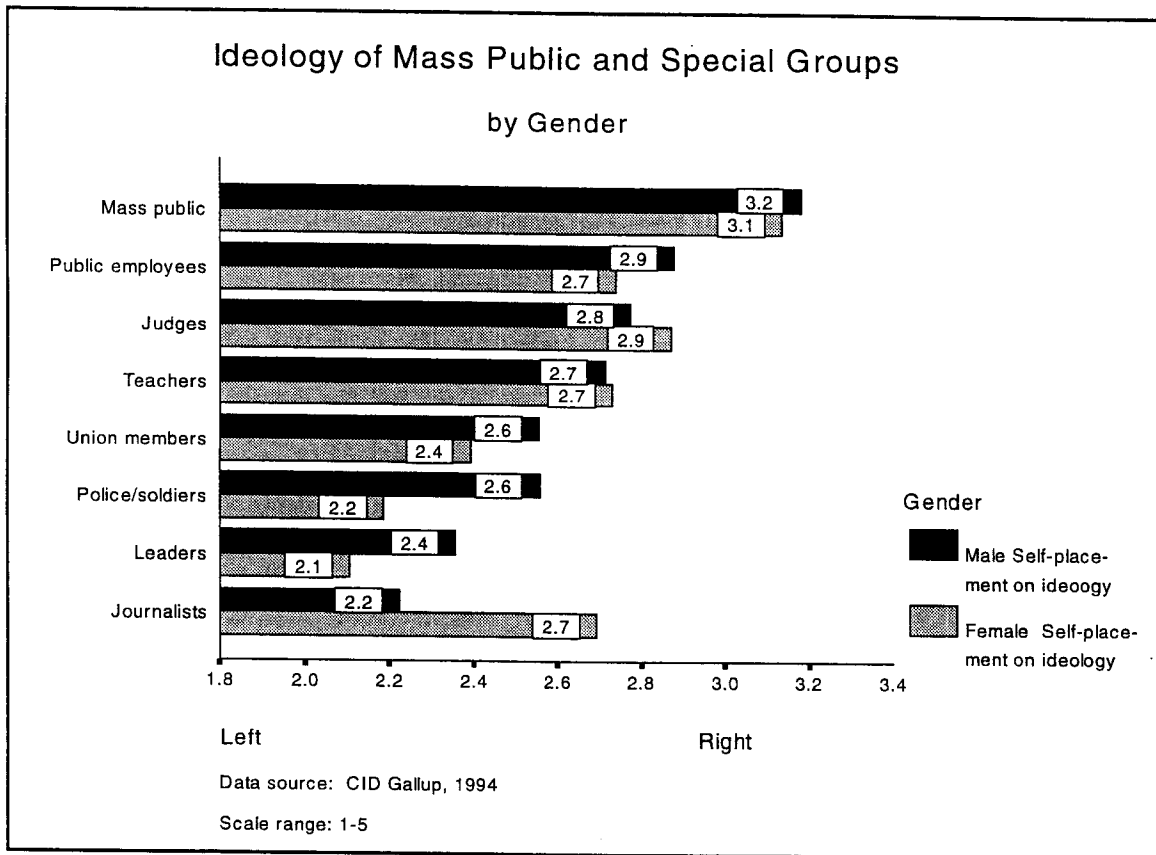


Figure 2.15

Trust in Specific Institutions

The Gallup survey provides a detailed look at 14 specific institutions in Nicaragua that are important for democracy. In Figure 2.16, the levels of trust are shown. The original scale scores are transformed into a 0-100 range. The most trusted institutions in Nicaragua are the human rights organizations, followed by the mass media. There also is considerable confidence in public school teachers, a factor that suggests that they might serve as a good medium to increase support for democracy. It should be kept in mind, however, that the level of tolerance among teachers was found to be somewhat problematical. The Supreme Electoral Commission is also relatively high in trust, a finding that augers well for the probable legitimacy of the next round of elections in Nicaragua. Trust in the presidency and political parties and the judicial system is very low.

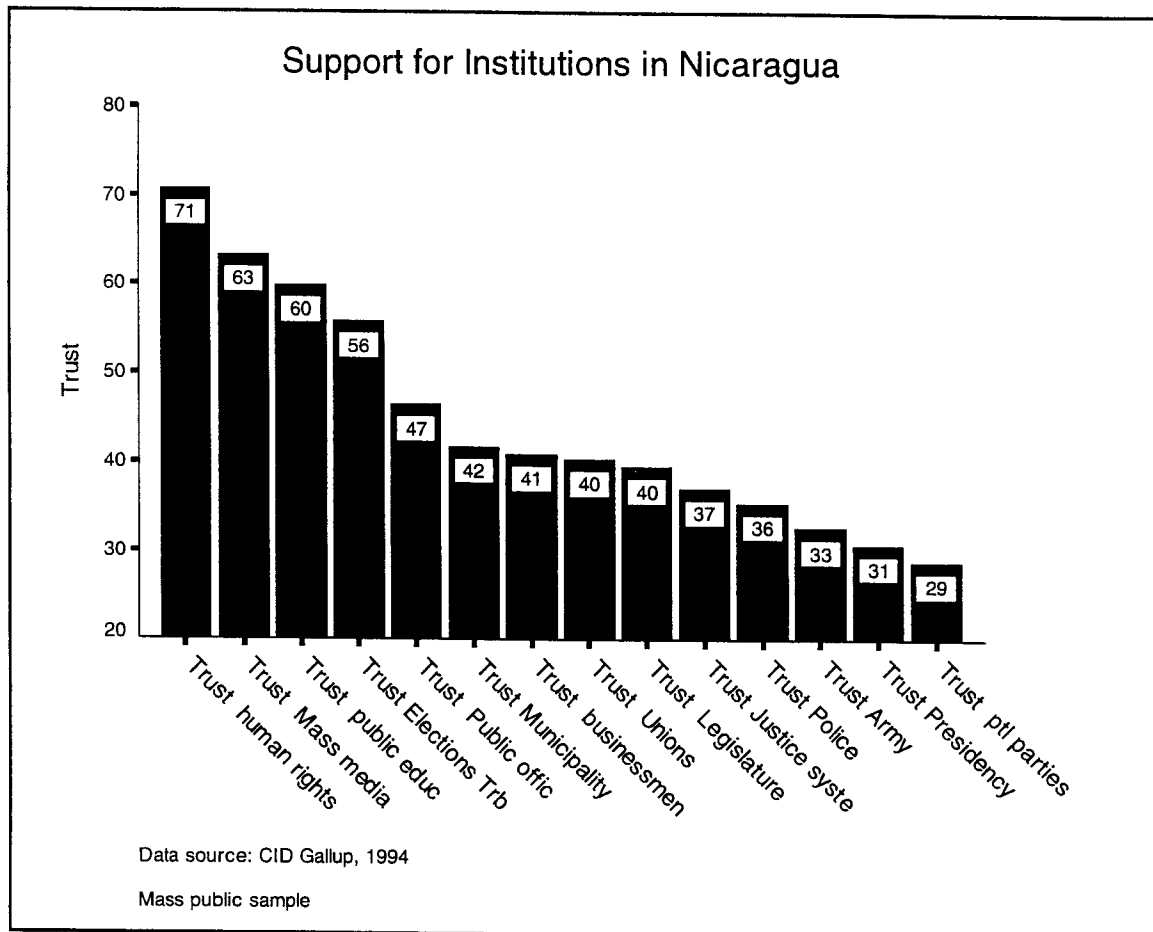


Figure 2.16

This examination of specific institutions for the mass public sample as a whole reveals that three key democratic institutions, parties, the legislature and municipal governments, receive only weak support from Nicaraguans. Indeed, if one examines the scale utilized above, each of these institutions scores below the 50-mark, that is, for the average Nicaraguan, these institutions are perceived negatively. Figure 2.16 also demonstrates that not all institutions are distrusted by Nicaraguans, but of the key institutions of government, only the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is trusted, on average.

It needs to be kept in mind that these low trust scores for key democratic institutions are for the mass sample, and it has already been shown that the mass public trust levels are higher than any of the special samples. This suggests that for the special groups, we might expect to find lower support for these specific key democratic institutions. A test of that expectation is presented in Figure 2.17. The first institution to be examined is political parties, the one with the lowest trust of any of the institutions studied. Three conclusions can be drawn from examining figure 2.17. First, average trust scores for all of the groups and the mass sample are indeed low, averaging between 20 and 40 on the 100-point

scale. Second, male/female differences are almost non-existent except among the police/soldier groups, in which the males are far more trusting of parties than females. The same pattern is found for judges, but the difference is much less sharp. Third, in contrast to expectation, the mass public is not more trusting of parties than the various special groups. Indeed, leaders, police and soldiers, union members, teachers, and public employees are each more trusting than the mass public. Only public employees, journalists and judges are less trusting of parties than the mass public.

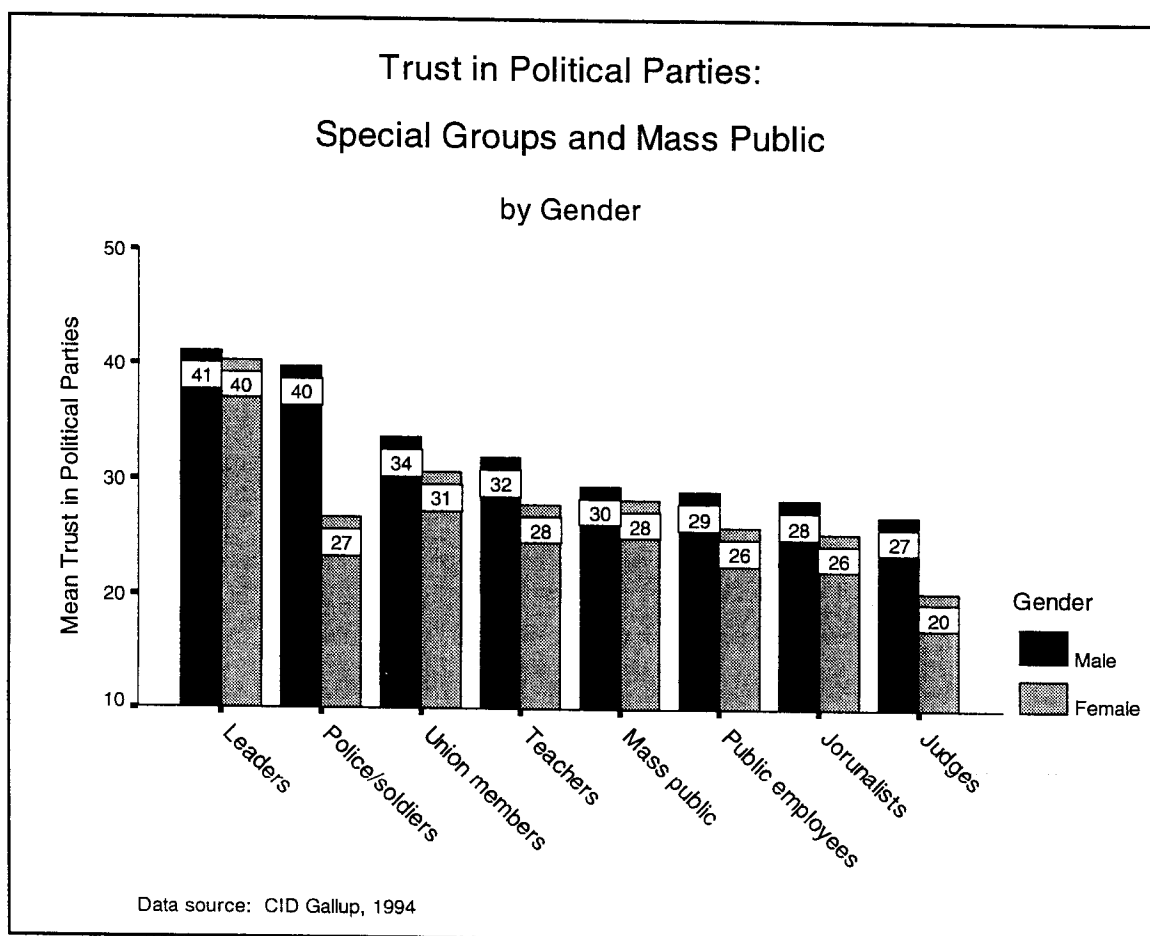


Figure 2.17

These findings prompt an examination of the other key democratic institutions. Although the presidency is important, analysis of that institution is so heavily “contaminated” by the character of an incumbent, that it is analytically impossible to separate the president from the presidency. Instead, the focus moves to the judiciary, a key democratic institution with low trust in Nicaragua among the mass sample. Figure 2.18 shows the comparison of the special groups with the mass sample. Although overall trust in the judiciary is higher than for parties, it is clear that this trust is found heavily

among the judges, not at all surprising, and the police/military. Among the public employees and mass public, trust levels dip down below 40 on the scale of 1-100, and fall below 30 for union members. Once again, the mass public is not the most trusting group, and once again, male/female differences are small except among judges and leaders, where female trust is much higher.

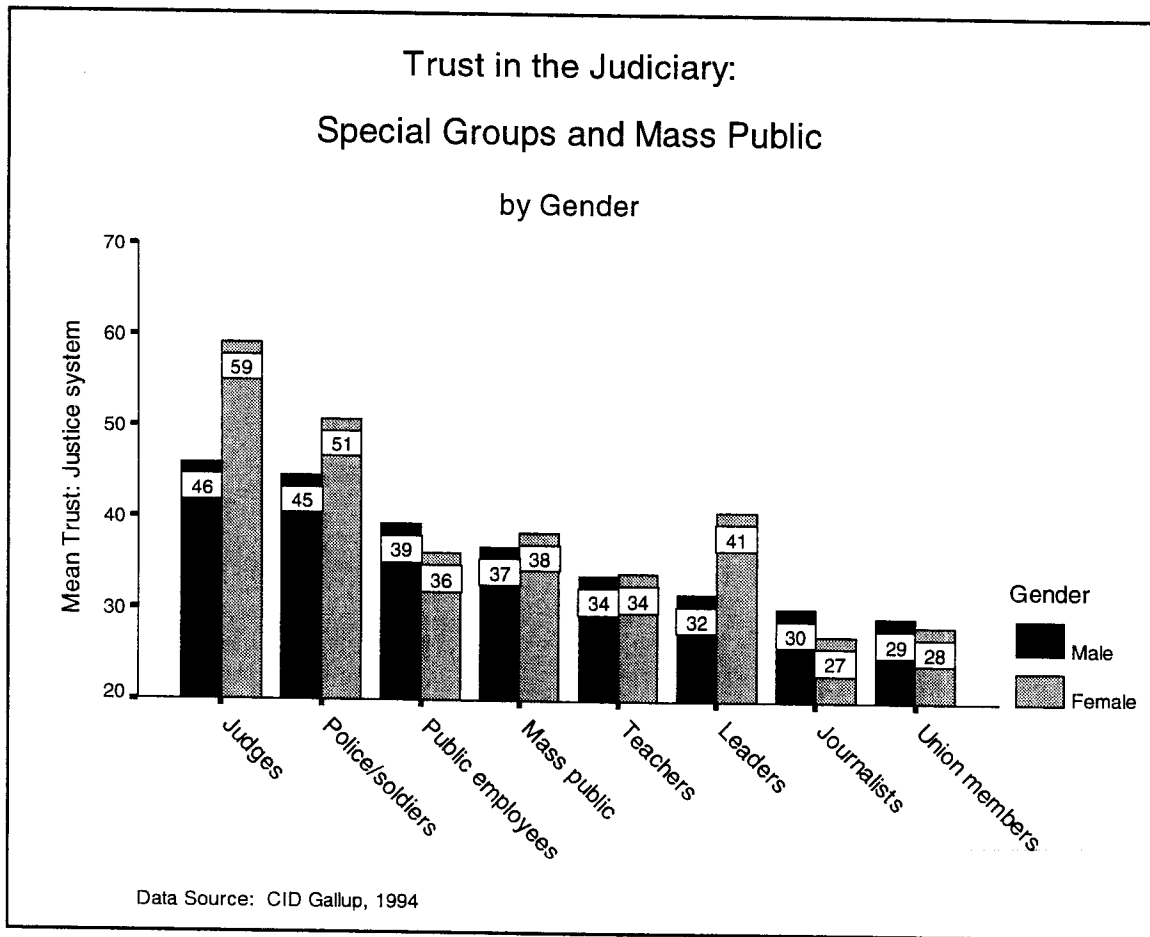


Figure 2.18

The next institution to be examined at the group level is the legislature. The results are shown in Figure 2.19. Once again police and military score high, but it is surprising to see that journalists are the second most trusting in the legislature of any group. Leaders are also relatively high on trust, but it is important to emphasize that only among police/soldiers, female journalists and female leaders does trust in the legislature score in the positive end of the continuum.

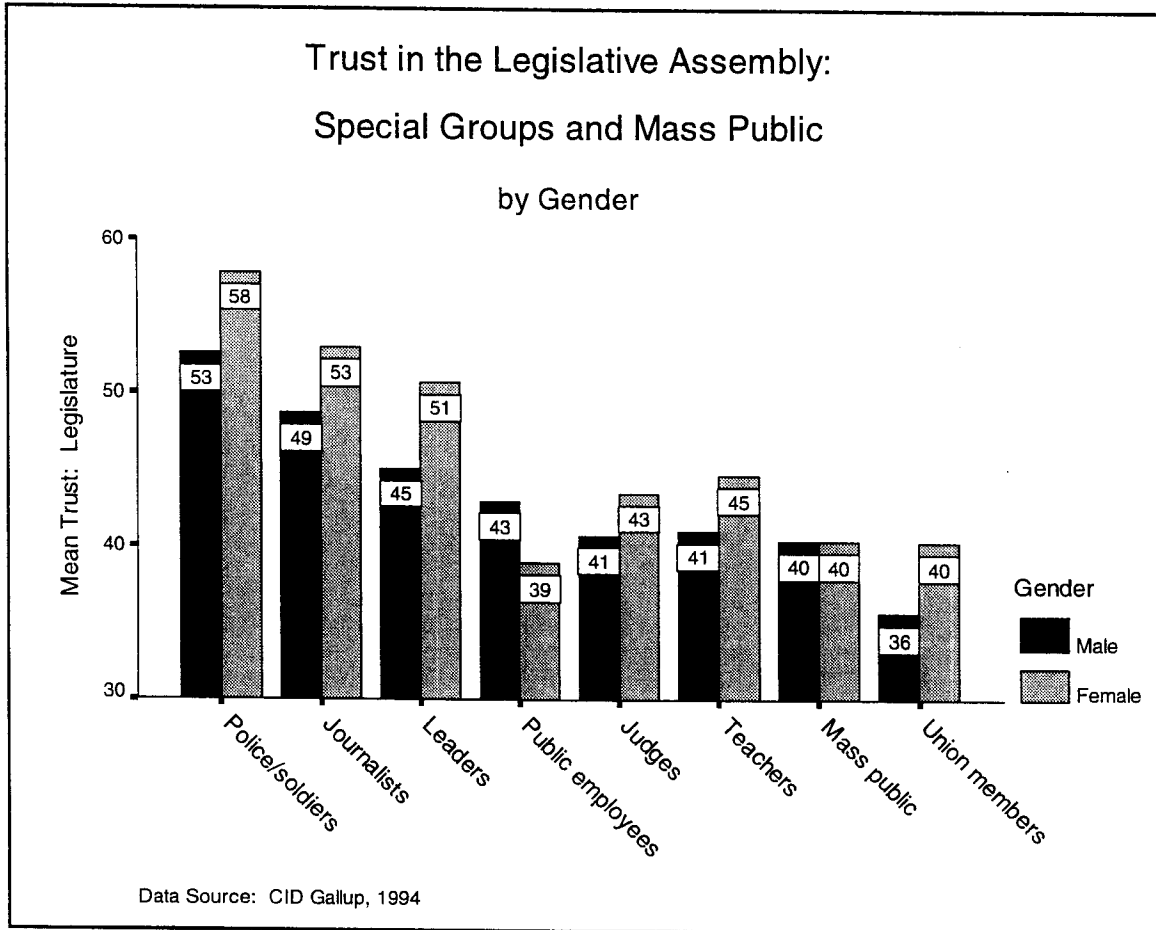


Figure 2.19

The mass media play an important role in any society. In Figure 2.20 it is shown that the police and mass public trust the media more than any of the special groups. Among all of the groups, except teachers and judges, the average trust level is in the positive end of the continuum. Teachers and judges, however, are especially mistrustful of the mass media. The gender gap is not especially great on this question.

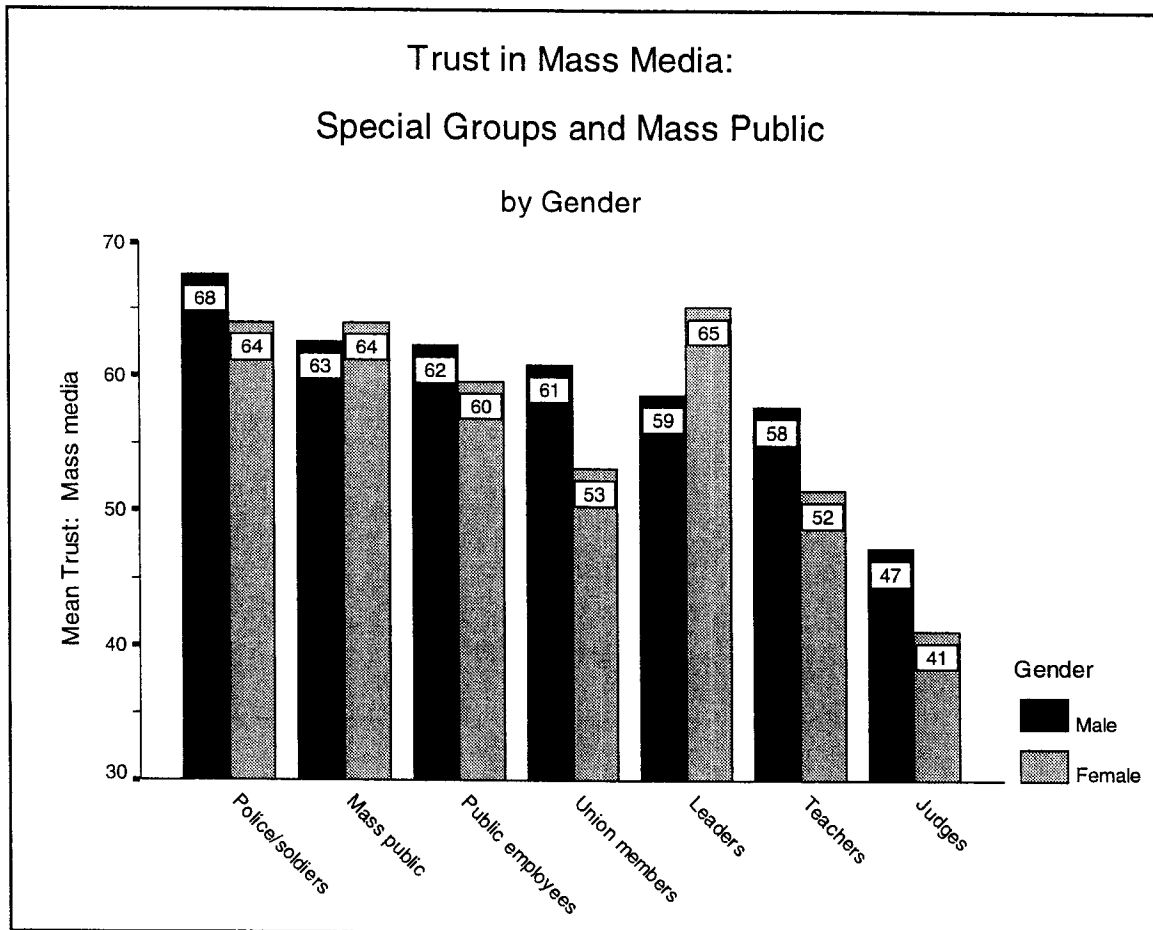


Figure 2.20

Trust in unions is considerably lower than it is for the media, as is shown in Figure 2.21. With the exception of the leader special sample, all of the other groups and the mass public ranked in the negative end of the continuum. Male/female differences follow a familiar pattern, with females less trusting, except for journalists, among whom females are far more trusting of unions than males. Union members were not asked this question by Gallup, but presumably they are more trusting of unions than the other groups.

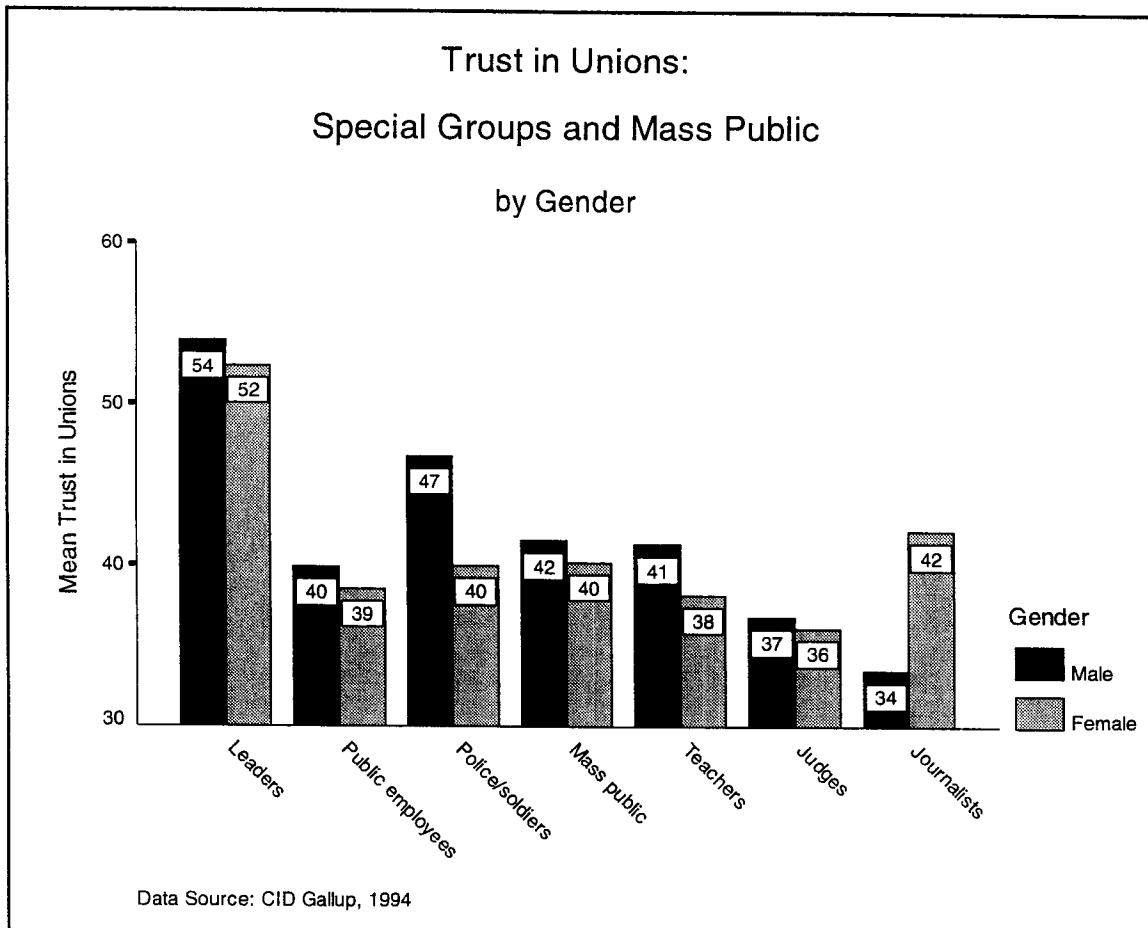


Figure 2.21

The final institution to be analyzed in detail is the municipality, the subject of a chapter-long study in this report. Figure 2.22 shows that trust in municipal government, while not high, is somewhat higher than it is in other fundamental democratic institutions. Perhaps the most important finding in this table is that it is in the municipality that the mass public has greater trust than does any other group in Nicaragua. This goes to reinforce the argument made elsewhere in this report that municipal government is a critical institution for building democracy at the grass roots among the mass public. At the other extreme are male journalists, who have an extremely low regard for municipal government. It is unclear why female and male journalists differ so greatly on this institution, and it is a finding well worth investigating. Equally important would be finding ways to educate journalists about local government, and in so doing encouraging them to provide greater coverage to this key democratic institution. As things now stand in Nicaragua, the mass media pay very little attention to what goes on in local government.

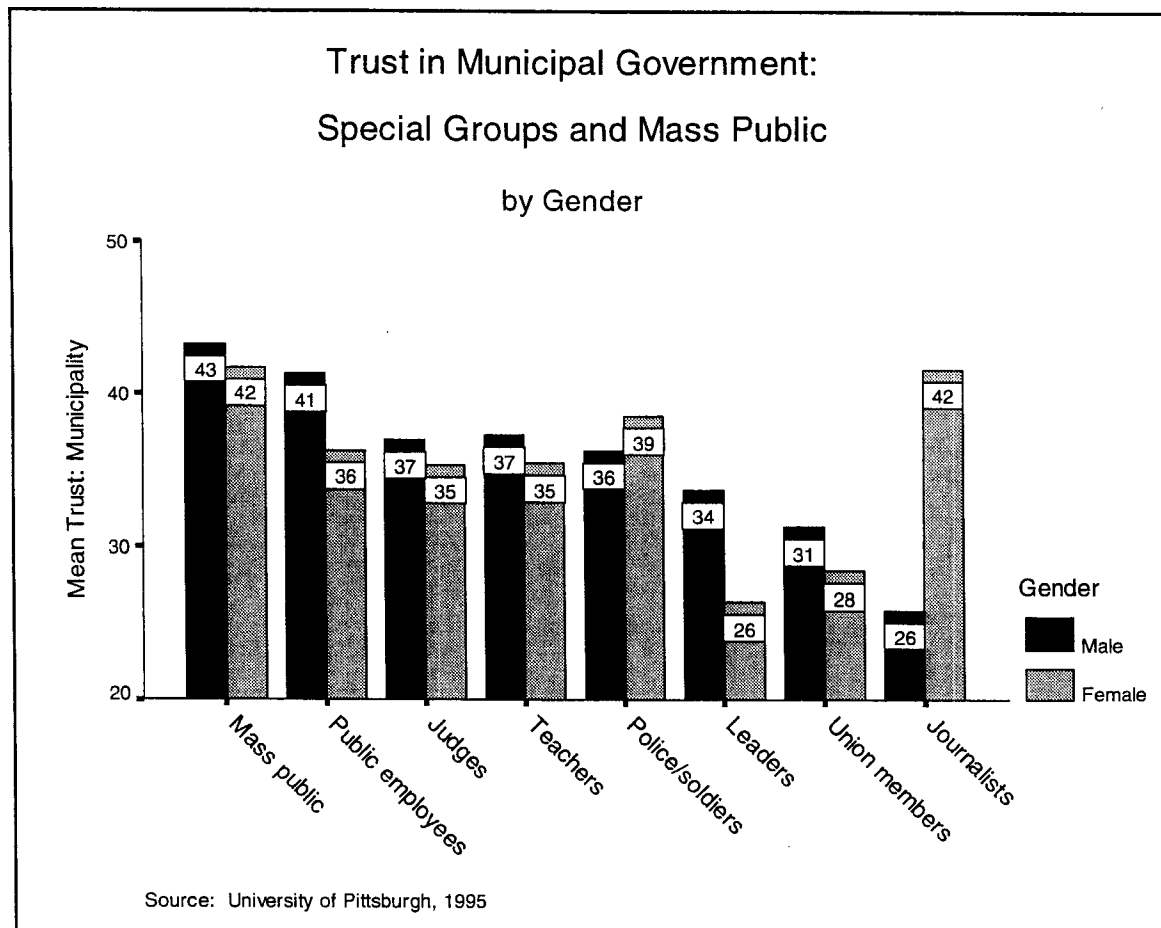


Figure 2.22

Conclusions

This chapter has found that a significant shift in the direction away from stable democracy has taken place since the election of President Chamorro. Between 1991 and 1995 many more of the residents of Nicaragua express low system support, which, when combined with their levels of tolerance support, suggest a move away from stable democracy.

It is appropriate to ask if low system support reflects a lack of consensus over basic norms and values. The review of the responses to the least-liked group question suggests that this may indeed be the case. In Nicaragua there is no commonly accepted target of dislike. Rather, among the mass public substantial proportions of the population selected groups on the left, while only a somewhat small proportion selected groups on the right. Not only is the mass public split on its political dislikes, but, as a whole, the mass public

and the various special groups under study here also differ, with the special groups more likely to select the right as a target of dislike. In the following chapter, an effort is made to explore some of the underlying motivations for these findings.

Chapter 3. Conflicting Images of the Legitimate Role of the State

Few countries have undergone such radical shifts in regime type as has Nicaragua. For much of the twentieth century, under the dynasty of the Somoza family, the Nicaraguan state was a closely controlled family corporation and politics were authoritarian. During this period, foreign capital was welcome, taxes were low and state services were limited, and economic redistribution programs were almost non-existent. With the fall of the last Somoza and the coming to power of the Sandinistas, a very different agenda was established. Under the new regime, capitalist enterprises were relegated to a second-tier position, while the state grew by leaps and bounds. The Sandinista government attempted to expand social services and carry out redistributive reforms (especially land reform). While foreign capital investment was not discouraged, the policy emphasis on socialist programs resulted in the deflection of most private investment, both domestic and foreign. Indeed, Nicaragua suffered enormous capital flight during this period. The insurrection of counter-revolutionary forces coupled with other domestic pressures resulted in a massive expansion of the armed services and a channeling of scarce funds to military expenditures. Politically, although the regime was fundamentally authoritarian in nature, it encouraged popular participation in a wide variety of areas. In 1990 the Sandinistas lost power to a center-right opposition that came to power with an agenda that included the dismantling of many of the Sandinista programs. Democratic institutional structures, especially a functioning legislature and judiciary were slowly built, and regular elections became a widely held expectation. In short, in the period of only a little more than a decade, Nicaragua has experienced three dramatically different kinds of political regimes.

The results of these dramatic shifts in political regime type have not been favorable for Nicaragua's economic development. As is shown in Figure 3.1 below, since the mid 1970s, GDP per capita began to decline and by the 1990s had fallen to historical lows; by 1994, the GDP of Nicaragua was no higher than it was in 1920, the earliest point for which data exist for the Central America region.¹

¹These data are from Victor Bulmer Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, and updates by CEPAL. The updated series for the five Central American countries appears in Mitchell A. Seligson, Juliana Martínez and Juan Diego Trejos, *Reducción de la Pobreza en Costa Rica: El Impacto de las Políticas Públicas*. San José, Costa Rica and Quito Ecuador: United Nations Development Program and CORDES, September, 1995.

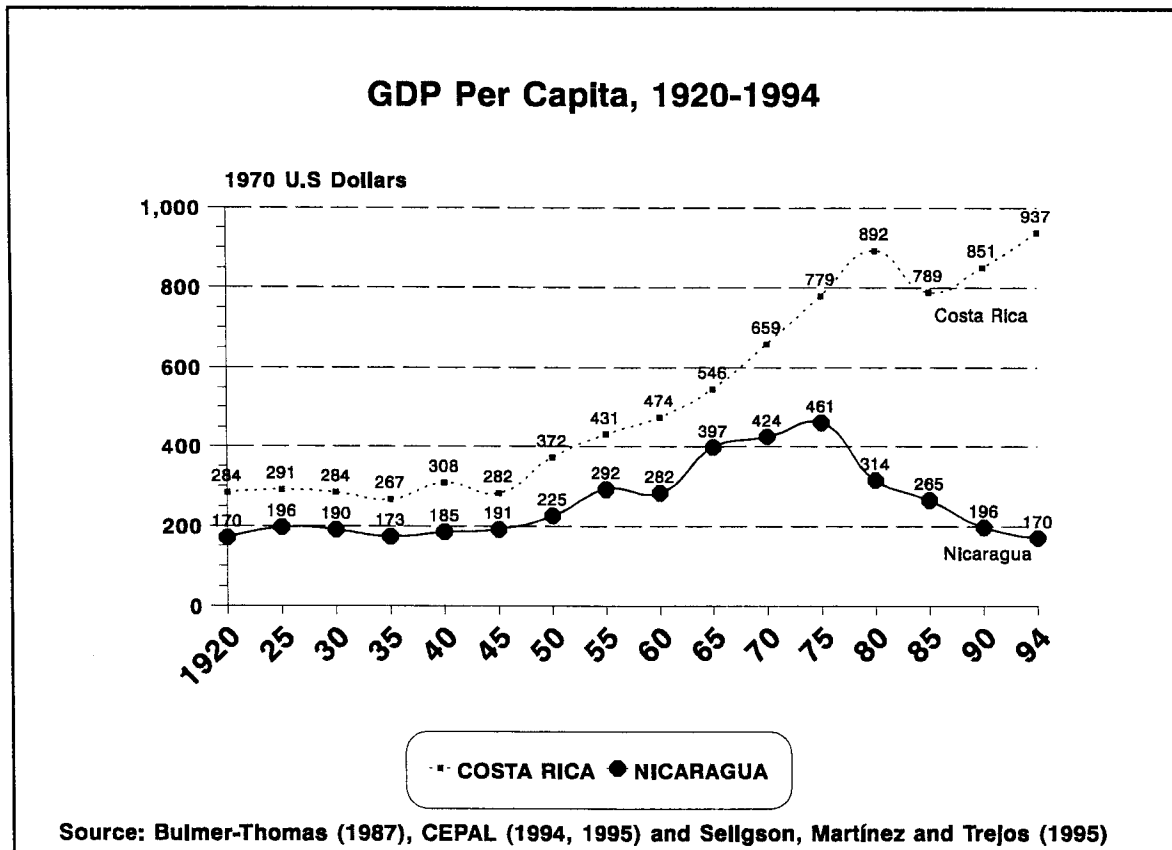


Figure 3.1

Chapter 2 of this study has shown that system support in Nicaragua declined sharply between 1991 and 1995. Since many analyses of system support show that over the long term its levels are influenced by the performance of government, one should not be surprised to find that support has fallen so low in a country whose economic system has performed very poorly. While few Nicaraguans are aware of the historical information presented in Figure 3.1, most know very well how poorly their economy has performed and how they personally have been affected by that performance.

Nicaraguans have had experience in recent years with three very different systems of political economy. Which one do they prefer? What role do they see for the state versus the private sector? Is there a consensus, or are there divisions along ideological, regional and gender lines? Does the mass public agree with the special samples studied for this project, and do the special sample groups agree with each other. These issues are the subject of this chapter.

The 1994 CID Gallup study included two sets of items in which respondents were able to talk about the role of government. In the first set to be analyzed here, the focus is on the legitimate role of government. The second set evaluates the success/failure that different types of governments (i.e., democratic, military, Sandinista, etc.) would have managing these functions.

The Proper Role of Government

Equality versus Liberty

The most general question on the subject of the role of government that was included in the 1994 survey was one that in many ways gets at the heart of the matter: "In a society, which do you think is the most important for everyone? That the laws promote economic and social equality or that they promote individual liberty?" This is, of course, a very difficult question to answer. Many people would prefer both, that is a society that promotes equality *and* individual liberty, and a case can be made that both could be achieved under appropriate circumstances. Yet, the question attempted to force respondents to select between these two societal goals in order to see which one the respondents prefer most. The results for the mass public are shown in Figure 3.2. About 7% of the respondents did not answer this item. The data presented here refer to those who did reply (i.e., the non-missing portion of the sample), and as a result, the two bars together for each group do not total 100%. The largest non-response is among the mass public, but even there, 82% gave an answer.

The results shown in Figure 3.2 are very revealing. They show, as has been noted before, a very wide spread of opinion across the various groups being studied. The mass public is more likely to favor laws that promote individual liberty than equality, but an almost equal proportion see it the other way around. Only 6 percentage points separate the two positions. Their views are quite similar to the journalists, who split almost in half, with 46% favoring each position. The remaining groups differ substantially from the mass public and journalists. Each of them, from judges through union members, strongly favor laws that promote equality over those that promote individual liberty. To put the contrast most starkly, while only a bit more than one-third of the mass public favors equality over liberty, about two-thirds of judges, public employees, police/soldiers, teachers, leaders and union member select equality over liberty.

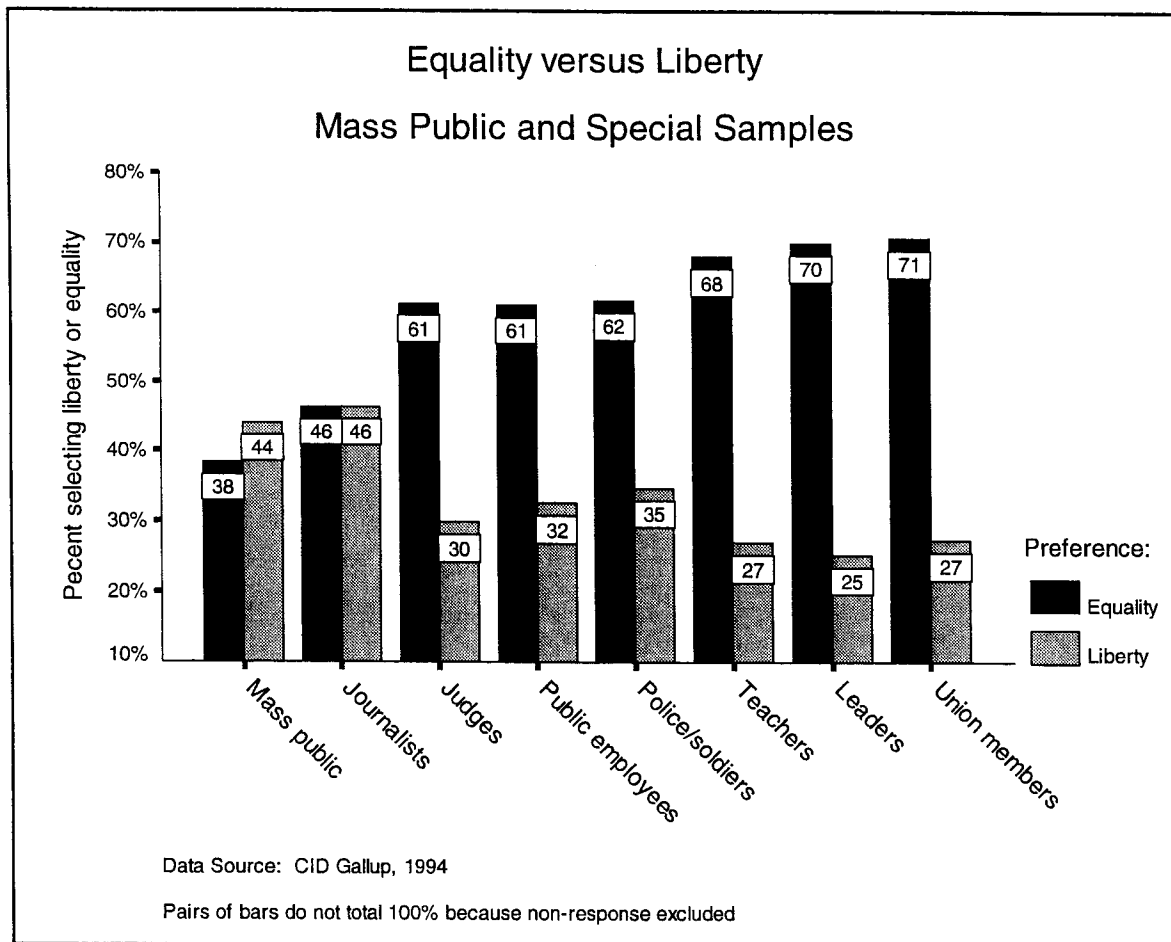


Figure 3.2

These findings suggest that it is important to explore these different preferences in more detail. Ideology is a factor already shown to be very important in Nicaragua. Do ideological differences translate into policy preferences? Figure 3.3 shows that they do for the mass sample. Those on the left are far more likely to favor equality over liberty, whereas those on the right far more strongly favor liberty of equality. The patterns among the special samples are similar but vary enough to make the presentation of a single figure with each of the seven groups displayed a bit too confusing.

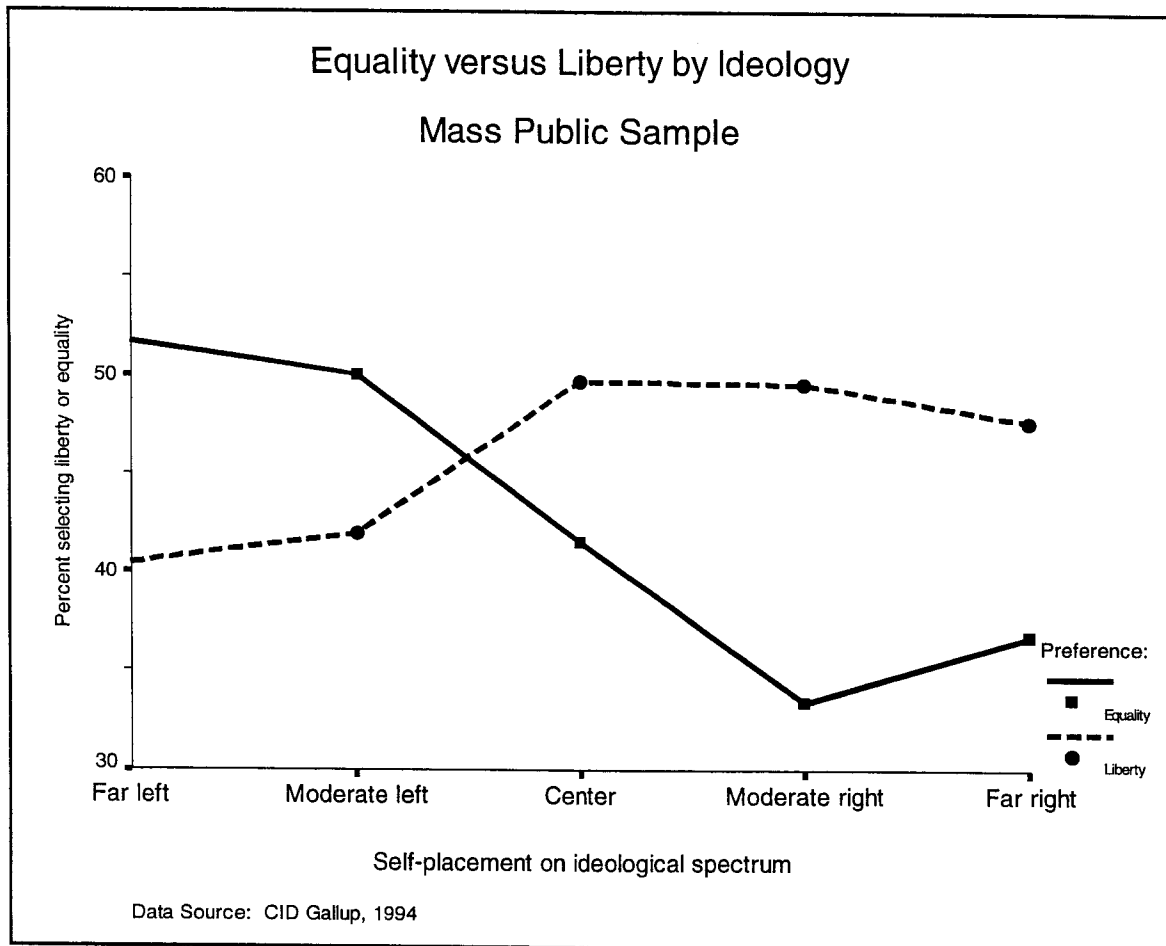


Figure 3.3

Among the mass public, education also has a powerful influence on policy preferences. As shown in Figure 3.4, a clear pattern emerges from primary education levels on. The more education Nicaraguans have, the more likely they are to select equality over liberty.²

²It will be noted that both “equality” and “liberty” increase as choices as education increases from none to primary. That is because non-response is highest among those with no education and therefore there is an increase in responses for both categories (equality and liberty) as the education level increases from none to primary.

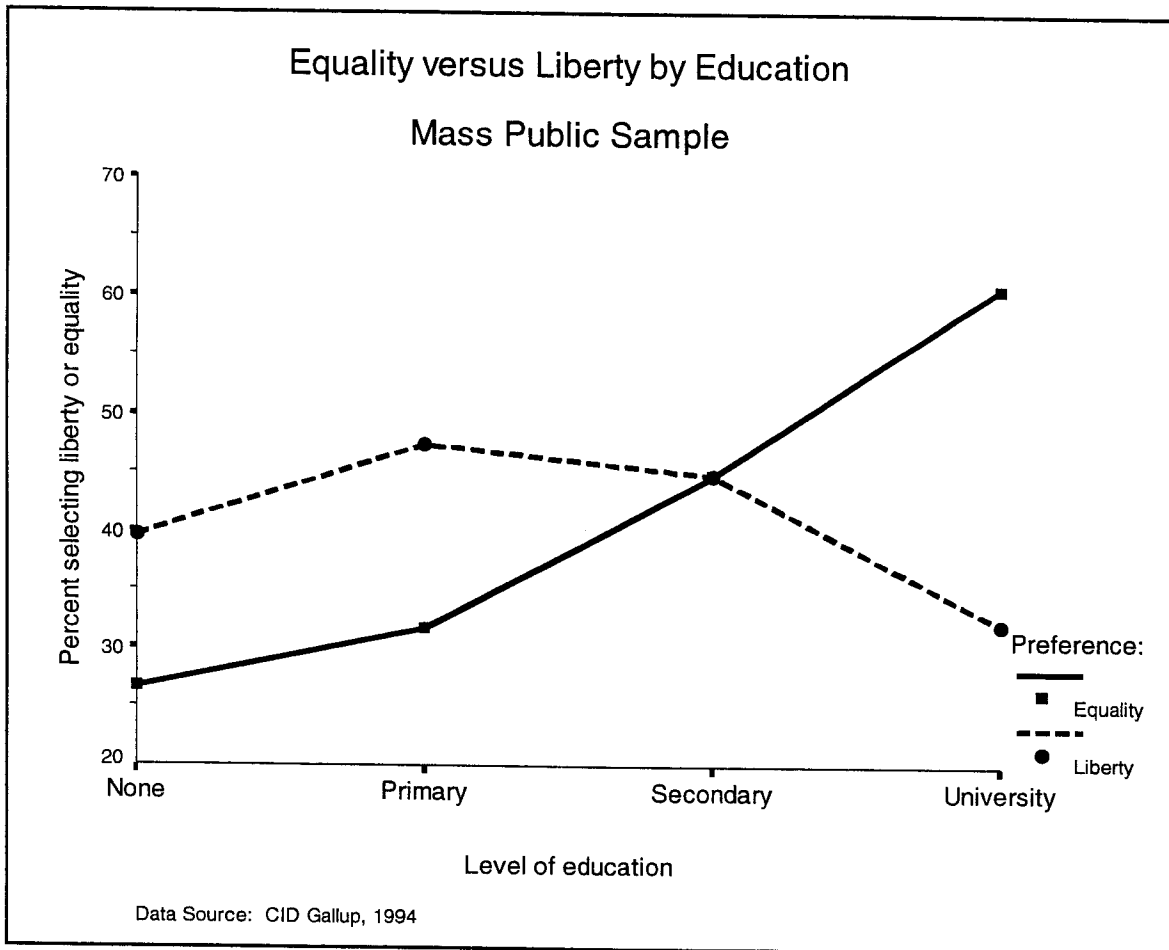


Figure 3.4

The patterns shown above are not altered by gender. As can be seen in Figure 3.5 below, males and females have almost identical preferences for equality at each level of education. The curve for liberty is not shown in order to simplify the chart, but it is virtually identical to the one shown here, except that as education increases, the preference for liberty falls.

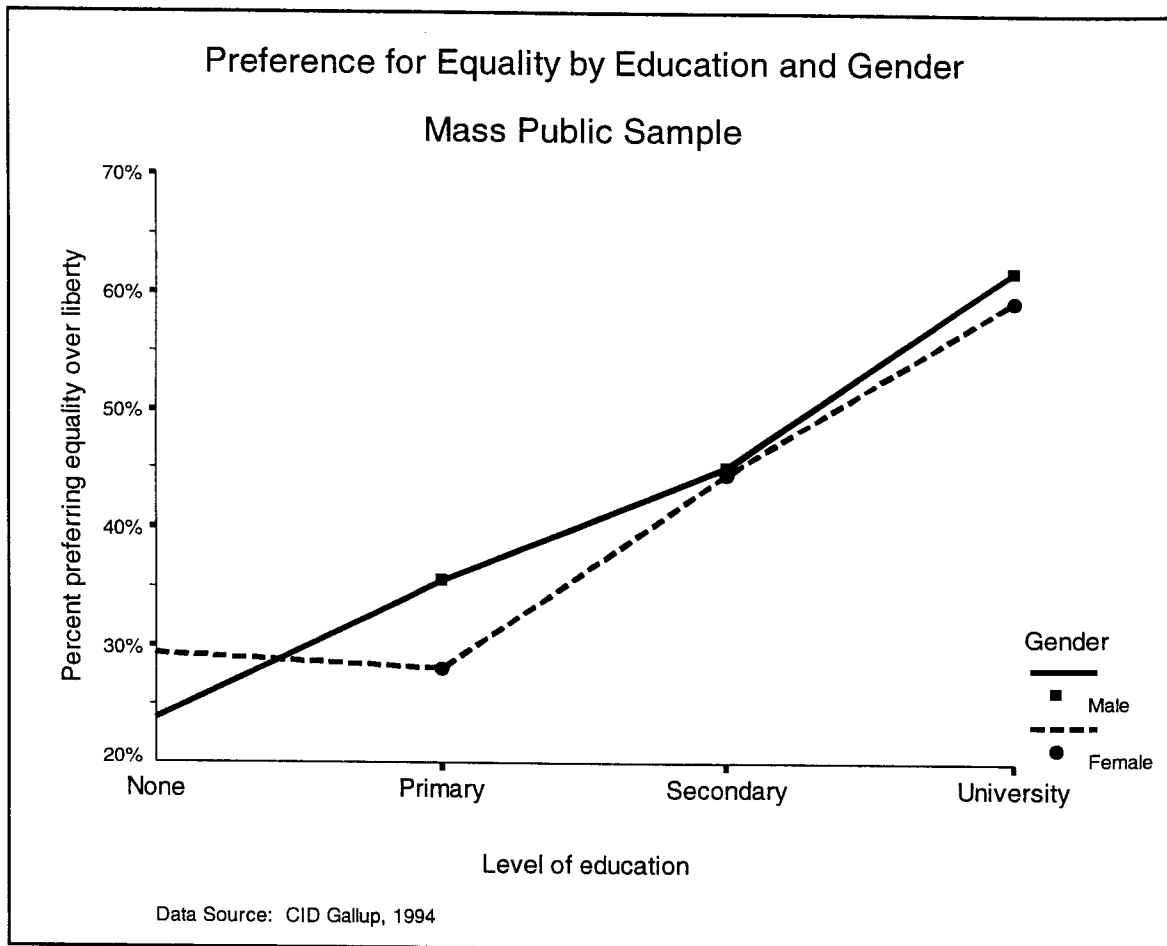


Figure 3.5

One final analysis to be conducted on this general view of policy preferences for Nicaragua is one based on region. Figure 3.6 shows that there are sharp differences among the departments, with less than one quarter of the population of Nueva Segovia preferring equality over liberty contrasted with one half of the population of Río San Juan making this choice.

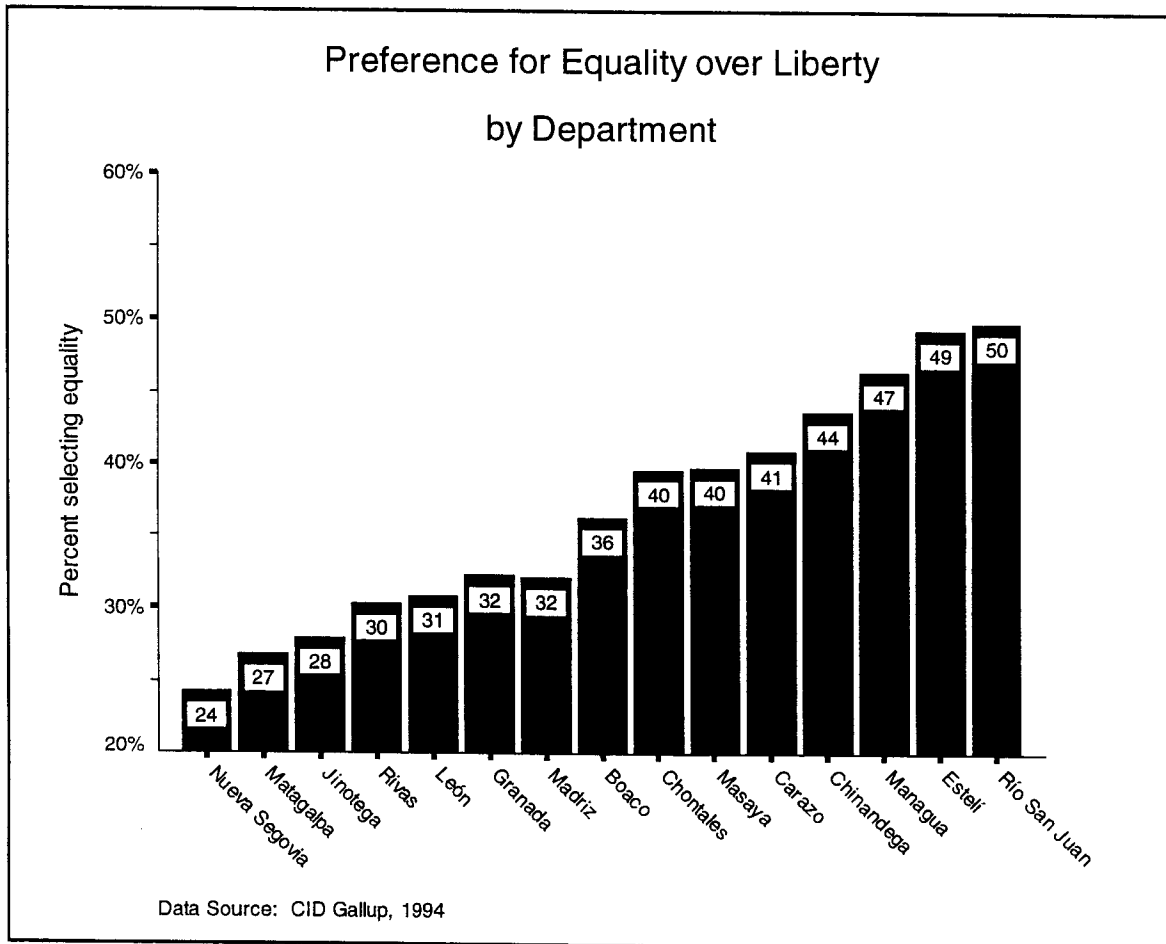


Figure 3.6

Protection of Private Property

A second item in the survey that tapped Nicaraguans policy preferences in a more detailed, specific fashion. It asked them the following question:

With which of the following sentences are you in more agreement?

“At times it is justifiable that the government confiscate owners’ property in order to distribute it to others.”

“The government never should take away property from its legitimate owners.”

This item applies in specific terms to the general principles articulated in the question of liberty versus equality. It is significantly correlated (< .001) with the liberty/equality item,

but the relationship is not very strong ($r = .12$, entire sample). This means that the specific application of the general policy is often inconsistent.

The basic data for this item are presented in Figure 3.7. It should be noted that Gallup did not ask this question of the special sample of teachers, and for that reason the results for this group are not included in Figure 3.7. The first point to notice in Figure 3.7 is that for most groups, two-thirds and more of those interviewed oppose expropriation of private property. The mass public offers the strongest opposition to expropriation of any of the groups in the survey, with over 75% opposing it. This is a position identical to the one it took with respect to the equity versus liberty question analyzed above. That is, the mass was the least favorable of all of the groups toward prioritizing equality over liberty and is similarly the least favorable to expropriation. The position of some of the special groups, however, does not coincide with the positions on the prior question. On that item, public employees were much more supportive of equality, whereas on the expropriation item, they are almost as strongly opposed as is the mass public. Union members and police/soldiers, however, are both supportive of equality and on the high end of the confiscation question. An overall conclusion to be drawn from a comparison of Figures 3.2 and 3.7 is that, while a strong majority of Nicaraguans in the special groups support the general principle of equality over liberty, strong majorities oppose the specific application of expropriation as a mechanism to achieve equality. It would appear that there are the outlines of a consensus on this issue, or at least as near a consensus as one might expect to achieve in Nicaragua. However much equality is a goal for some Nicaraguans, most oppose achieving it via draconian measures. This suggests that programs such as land reform do not have a bright future in Nicaragua, whereas private property rights are likely to retain widespread support.

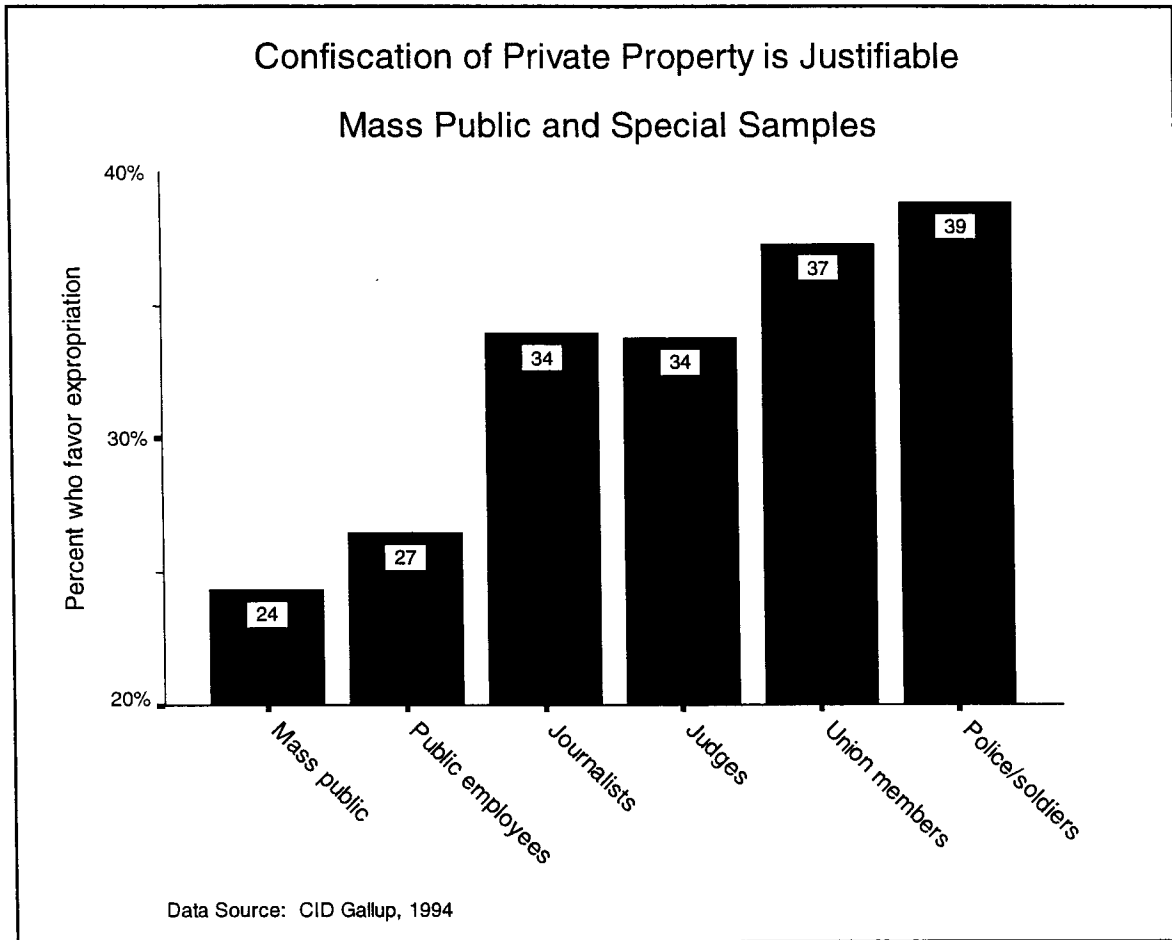


Figure 3.7

Ideology plays a strong role in responses to this question, but gender does not, as can be seen in Figure 3.8 (which includes the mass sample as well as the special groups). Those on the left are far more likely to favor expropriation than those on the right, a finding that was to be expected. Although males on the moderate left are higher than females on the moderate left, for the most part, the differences based on gender are small.

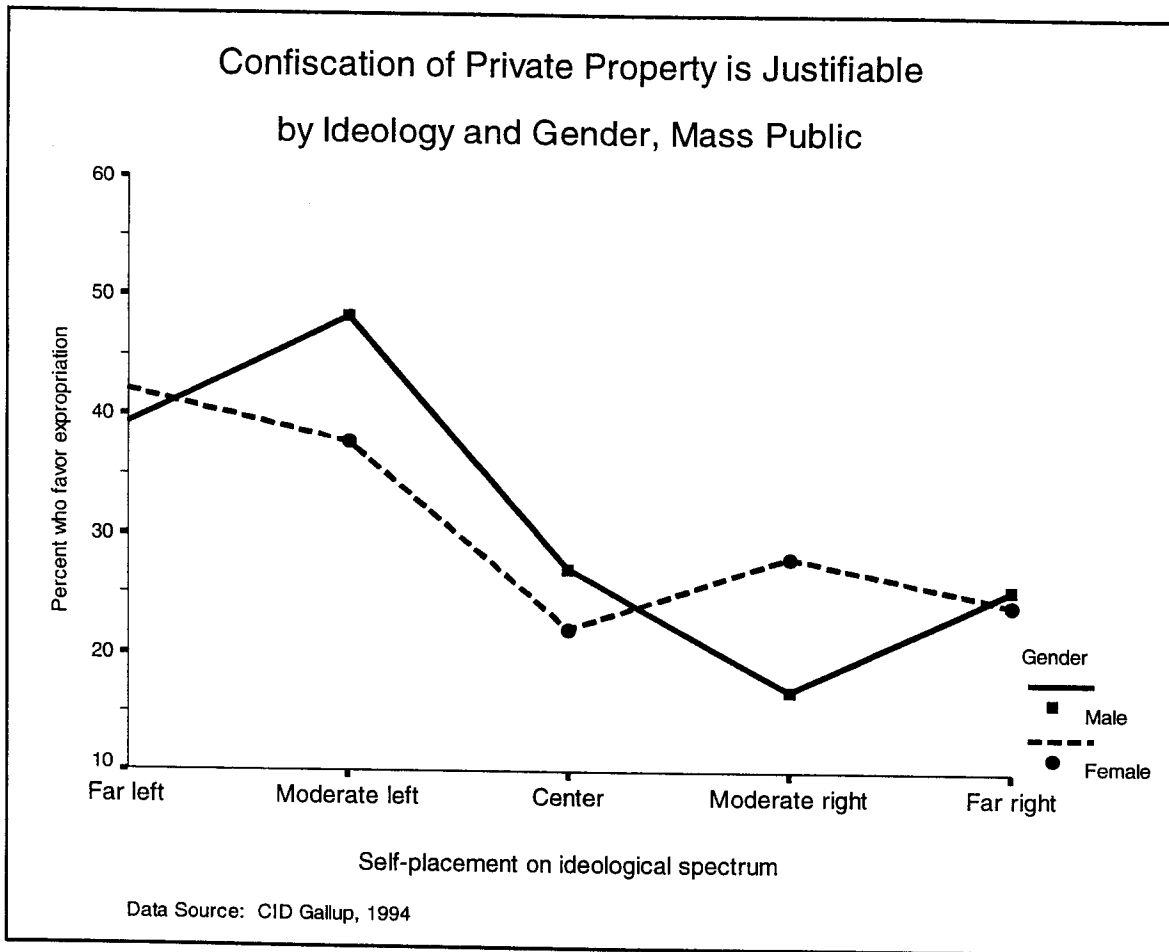


Figure 3.8

Education has the same relationship to favoring expropriation as it did to the equality/liberty question. As can be seen in Figure 3.9, which includes the mass sample as well as the special groups, gender once again play little role. Primary and secondary school educated females are less supportive of expropriation than males, but among the university educated, the differences disappear.

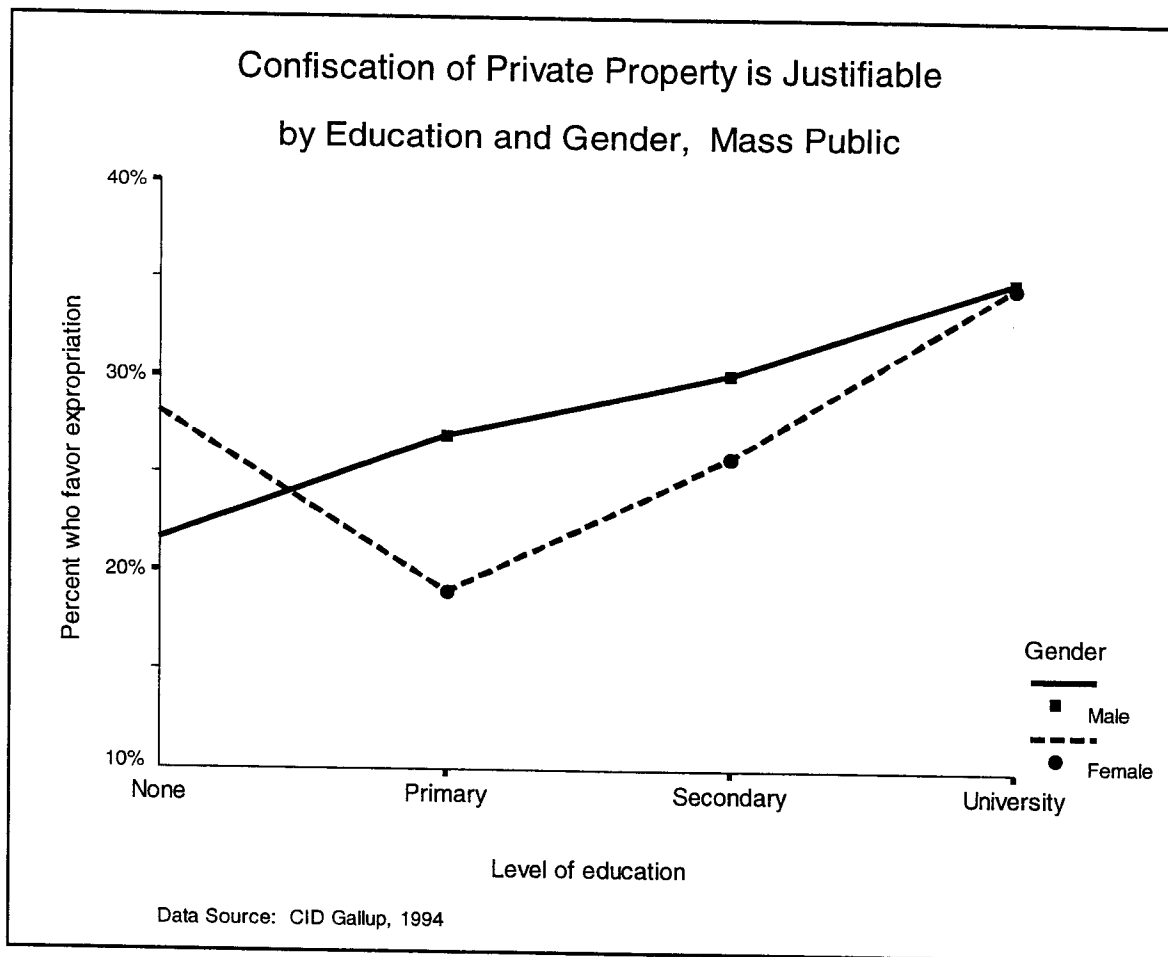


Figure 3.9

Departmental differences on the confiscation question are notable. Figure 3.10 shows the patterns. Chontales and Boaco are very low compared to the other departments while Jinotega is unusually high. Among the other departments, however, there is not a great deal of variation.

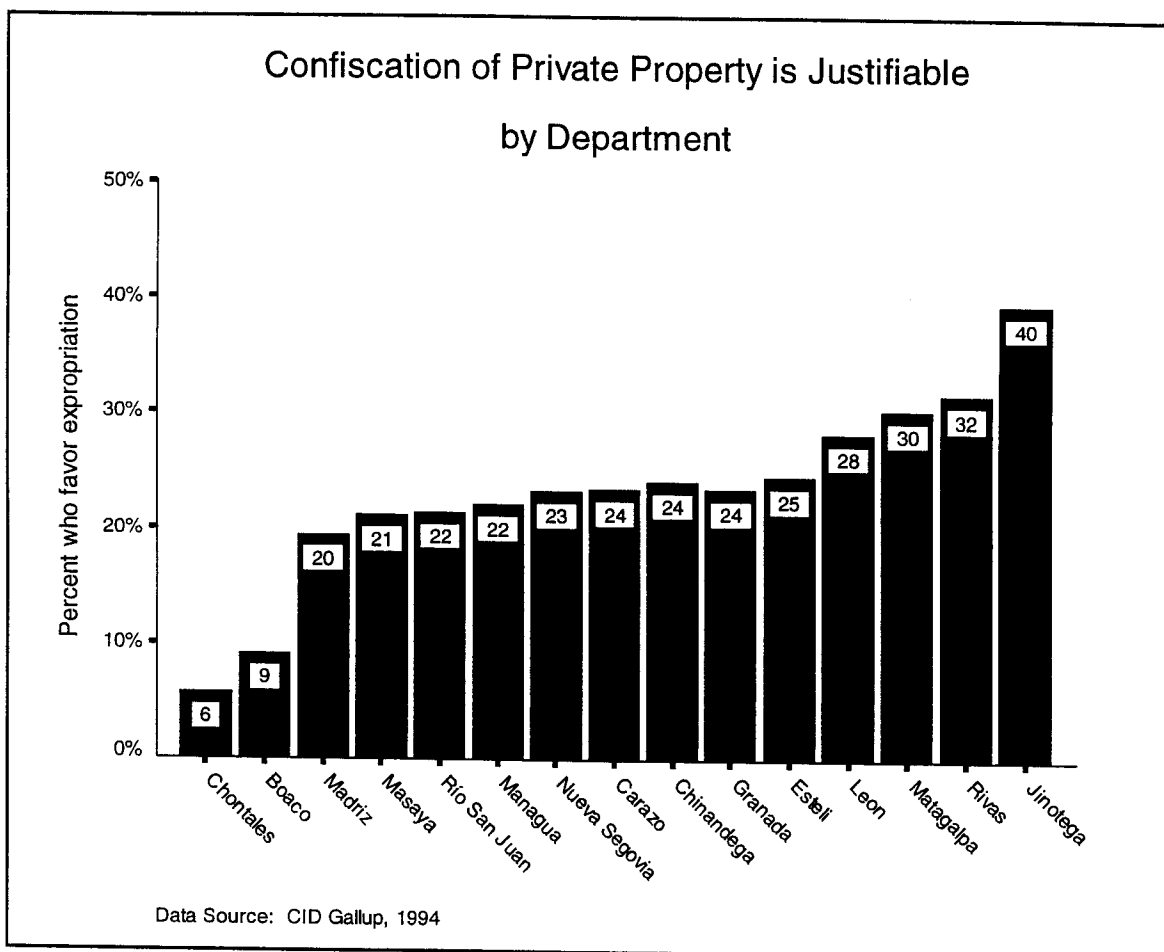


Figure 3.10

Government Role in Private Enterprise

The final item in this series on the proper role of government is one that probes the respondents' view toward the state-private sector relationship. The question asks the respondent to select between the following two alternatives:

The government ought not to interfere with an individual's business, nor should it be an owner of them.

The government ought to control the private sector and directly manage businesses or industries.

The results of the survey are contained in Figure 3.11. A majority of Nicaraguans favor free enterprise over government control. Among the mass public, 56% support free

enterprise, whereas among the various special groups, support is higher, reaching 80% among journalists. This result at first seems at variance with the mass public's strong opposition to confiscation of private property; on that item the mass public was more strongly opposed than any of the special groups. Here, on the free enterprise question, the mass public, while favoring free enterprise does so at a level lower than other groups. Put in other terms, while only 24% of the mass public finds confiscation of private property justifiable (see Figure 3.7), 44% of the mass public (see Figure 3.11) believes that government ought to directly control private business. In both cases, the mass public opposes strong state intervention, but confiscation of private property is much more strongly opposed than is government intervention in running businesses and industries. The special groups also oppose confiscation and favor free enterprise, but they are *relatively* less opposed to confiscation and relatively more favorable to free enterprise.

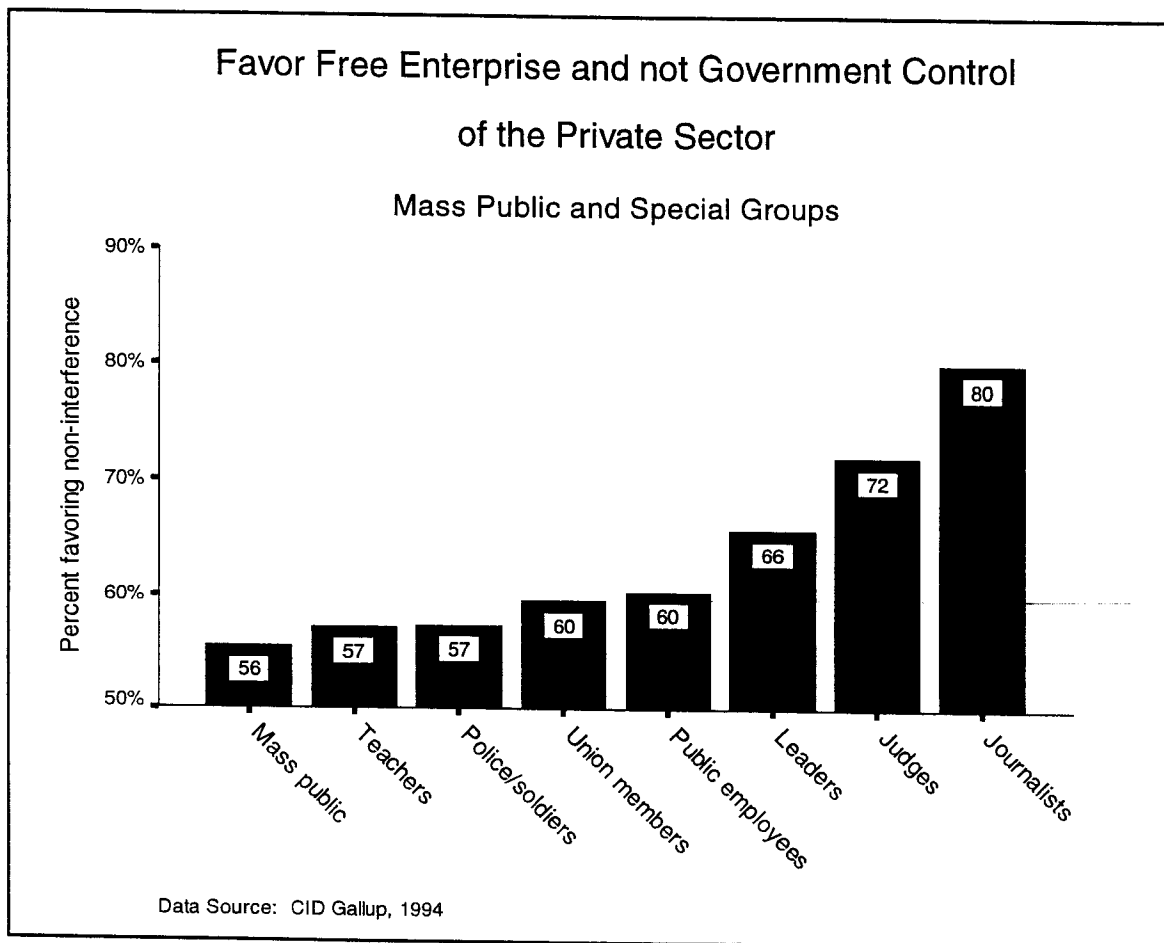


Figure 3.11

How can these results be explained? One factor has a great deal to do with the experiences of the mass public. Land reform affected wide areas of Nicaragua during the early years of the Sandinistas. While much of the reform was directed against the Somoza holdings, many other private individuals lost their land to expropriation. Evidently that experience soured the Nicaraguan mass public on expropriation as a means to redistribution. The mass public also opposes state control of the private sector, but they have also likely been victims of private sector profiteering. For example, many Nicaraguans rely on buses for transportation, and the results presented here suggest, for example, that a substantial minority might like to see the state regulating bus fares.

Further exploration of the data reveals much about the differences of opinion between masses and the special groups on this question. Figure 3.12 shows the impact of education and gender on support for government control of private enterprise. As can be observed, higher levels of education are strongly associated with non-interference in private business. Since the mass public is far less well educated, on average, than respondents in the special groups, it comes as no surprise that their level of support for independent private business is not as high as it is among the special groups. Gender plays virtually no role in the responses to this question as is seen in Figure 3.12. The only difference of note is that females with no education are more likely to favor free enterprise than males with no education. These results must be placed along side of the earlier findings in Figure 3.4, where it was shown that education was associated with greater support for equality over liberty, and Figure 3.9 where it was shown that higher levels of education were associated with favoring confiscation of private properties. When it comes to government control of the private sector, the relationship is dramatically reversed. Educated Nicaraguans, therefore, favor the principle of equality over individual liberty and are willing to support expropriation when necessary, but they strongly oppose government intervention in private business. A majority of less well educated Nicaraguans, however, while favoring free enterprise, are more likely to support state control over private business.

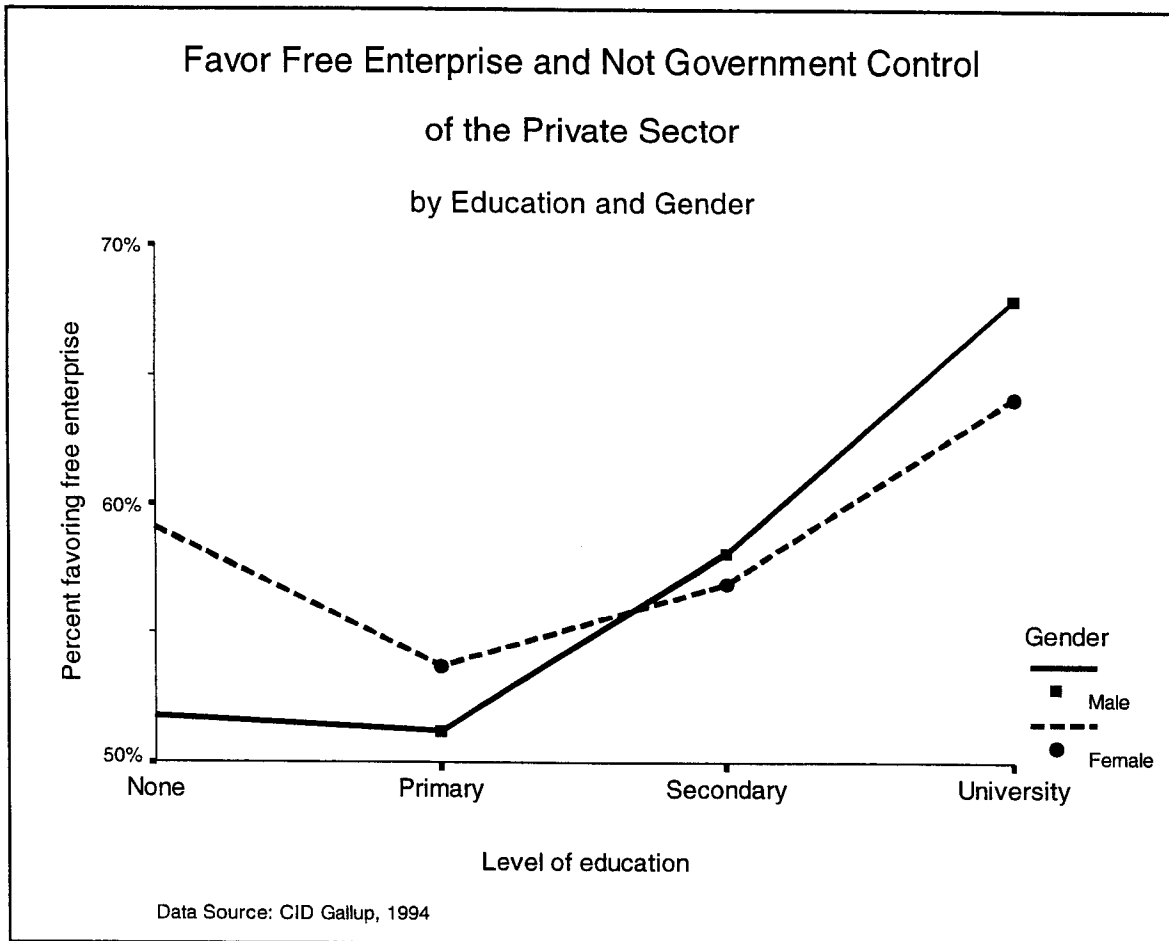


Figure 3.12

Further clarification of the responses on this item emerge in Figure 3.13. There it is shown that there is a relatively clear relationship between ideology and favoring enterprise free from government control. While the pattern is much as expected, with the left less opposed to government control than the right, *a majority of even the far left favors keeping government out of the private sector.* Ideological differences, then, do not separate Nicaraguans on the question of government control over private enterprise; left, center and right oppose it. Nonetheless, there is a substantial minority, especially among the less well educated, who favor it.

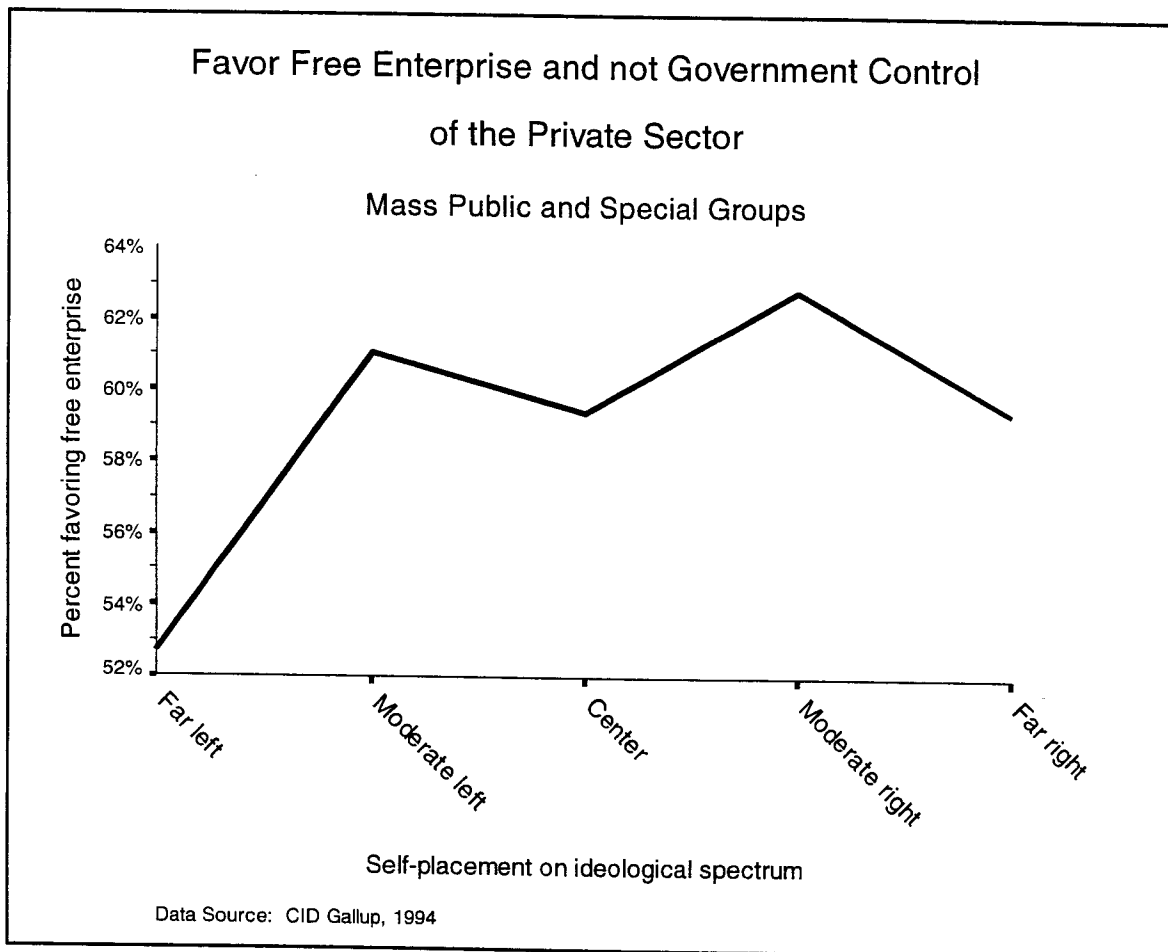


Figure 3.13

Democracy, Sandinismo and Somocismo

The low levels of system support found in contemporary Nicaragua indicates that citizens may prefer a political regime other than the one they now have. The survey asked respondents to consider a series of social/political problems and to say which kind of system best manages such problems. Three types of systems were given as options: democratic government, one-party government, or military government. The results for the mass public are shown in Figure 3.14. As can be seen, two-thirds of the mass public chose democracy, with nearly identical responses for all problems except combating crime, where democracy fell slightly to 64%.

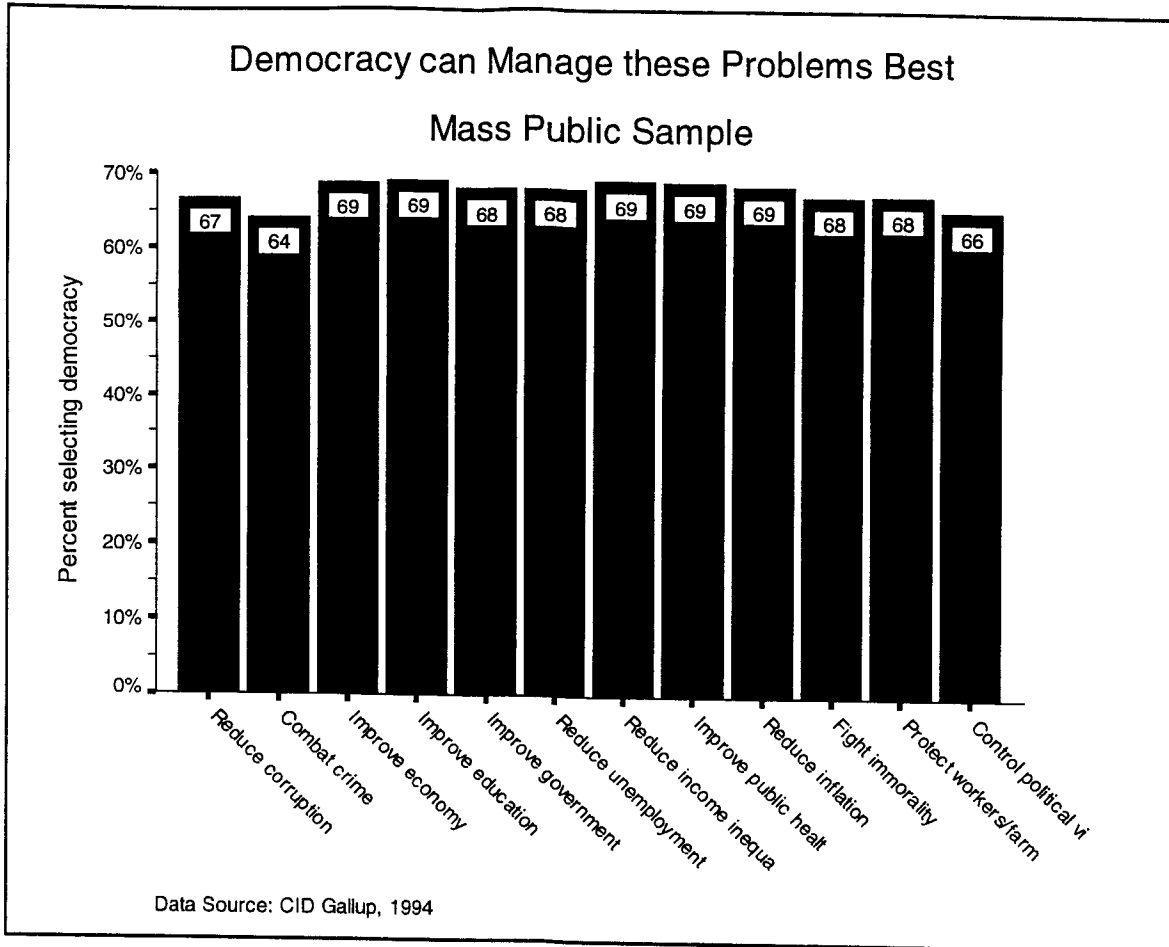


Figure 3.14

The special samples, taken as a whole, are displayed in Figure 3.15. The results are similar, except that the special samples, as a whole, are even more likely to select democracy as the best solution to national problems. With the exception of fighting crime (70%) and fighting immorality (74%), three-quarters or more of the special sample respondents selected democracy.

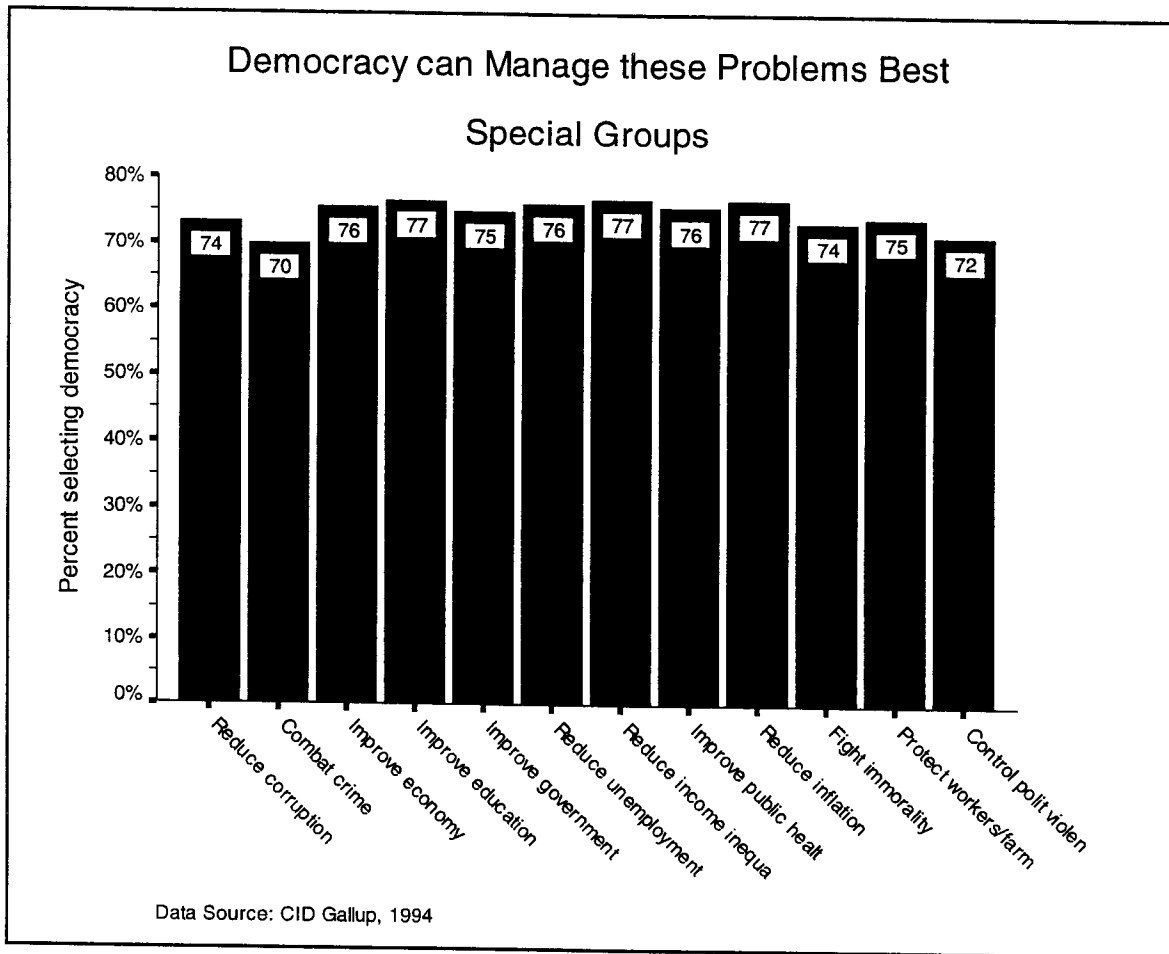


Figure 3.15

The conclusion that one can draw from this analysis is that both masses and the special groups overwhelmingly see democracy as the best solution to virtually all of the major problems Nicaragua confronts. In addition, little distinction is made among the problems, with democracy doing about as well for any one problem as it does for any other. Nonetheless, about one-third of the mass sample, and one-quarter of the elite samples, selected either one party rule or military government as their preferred solution. It is useful to examine in more detail the characteristics of those who prefer those solutions.

Little is to be gained by analyzing each of the separate questions since the responses to each were so similar. Indeed, the inter-item correlations (r) are .80 or higher, indicating that knowing a response to one item allows one to nearly perfectly predict the response to the other items. A more parsimonious way to proceed, therefore, would be

to select a single item and to analyze that one. Since the item on combating crime was the one in which there was somewhat lower support for democracy, it is the one that gives us more of an opportunity to examine variation in choice. Figure 3.16 shows the variation among the mass public and special groups studied here. The three bars for each group do not total 100% because of rounding. Non-response causes these percentages to vary slightly from those presented above. The military/police are the least likely to select democracy and the most likely to select the military or one party rule, while journalists are most likely to select democracy. With the exception of the military/police group, one party rule is favored strongly over military rule. But, among teachers, military rule is slightly more popular than one party rule. Union members and judges are least likely to prefer military rule. These distributions require careful study and consideration, but they continue to show two things. First, democracy is strongly preferred to other forms of rule. Second, among the mass public and some special groups, one party rule and, to a lesser extent military rule, are preferred by sizable minorities.

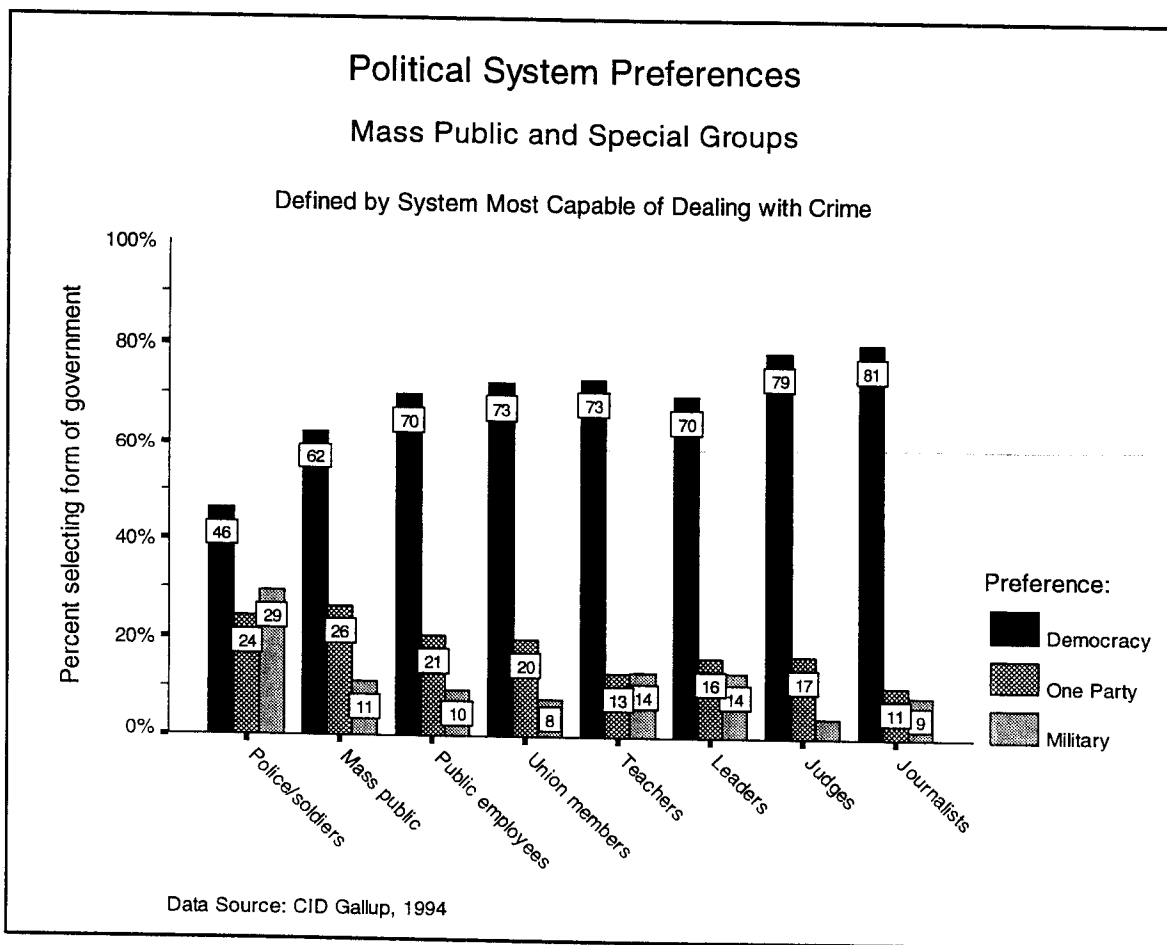


Figure 3.16

Preferences for system type are related to education, but not very strongly as is shown in Figure 3.17. Virtually no differences emerge until respondents fall into the higher levels of education category, when support for democracy increases and support for one party rule declines. Among university educated Nicaraguans in the mass public sample, over 70% support democracy. Support for military rule is essentially stable throughout the range of education. No notable differences emerge by department.

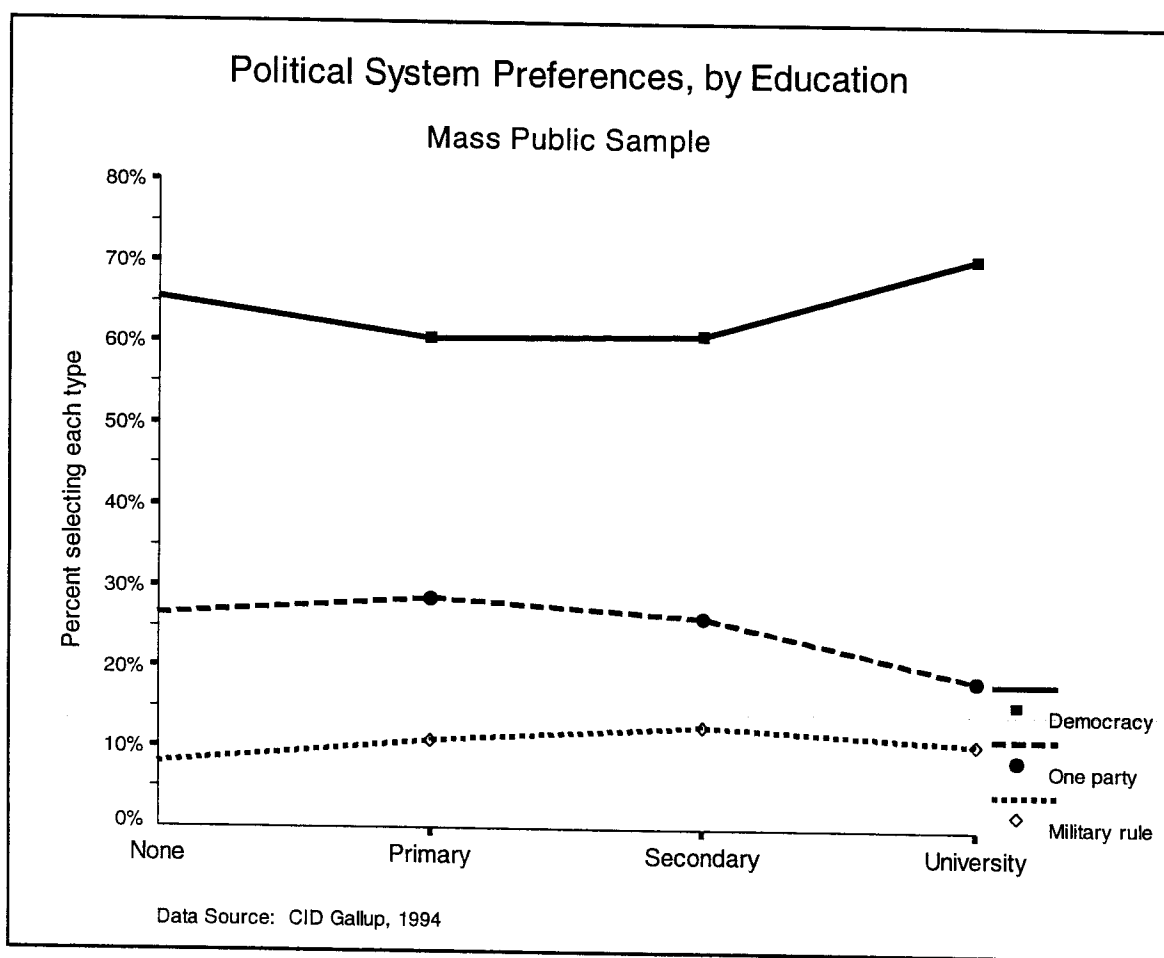


Figure 3.17

While education does not clearly differentiate the preference for democracy until Nicaraguans have had university education, gender plays a far stronger role. As is seen in Figure 3.18, female Nicaraguans are far less likely to select democracy than are males

irrespective of education level. At the level of university education, however, females come close to males in their preference for democracy.

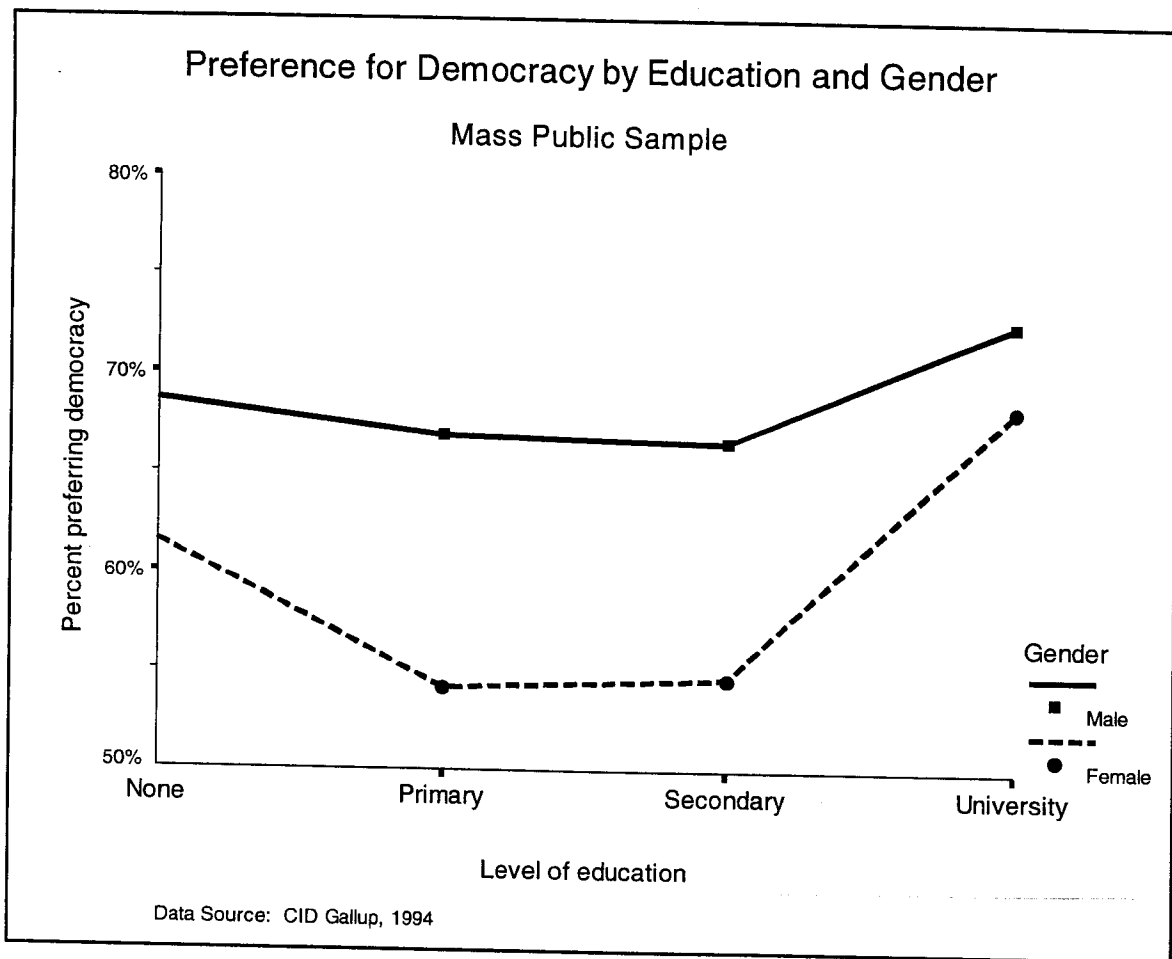


Figure 3.18

Sandinismo, Somocismo or Democracy

The questionnaire contained another series of items that attempted to examine democratic preferences by referring directly to the main political forces in Nicaragua: Sandinismo, Somocismo and democracy. One series was similar to the one just analyzed, but the results are easily summarized in a single question that asks the respondents to select among the three alternatives. The results are summarized in Figure 3.19. Unfortunately, this question was only asked of the mass public and one other special

group, so comparisons are not possible. As can be seen, the majority of the respondents chose democracy, one-fifth Sandinista rule and 8% Somocista rule.

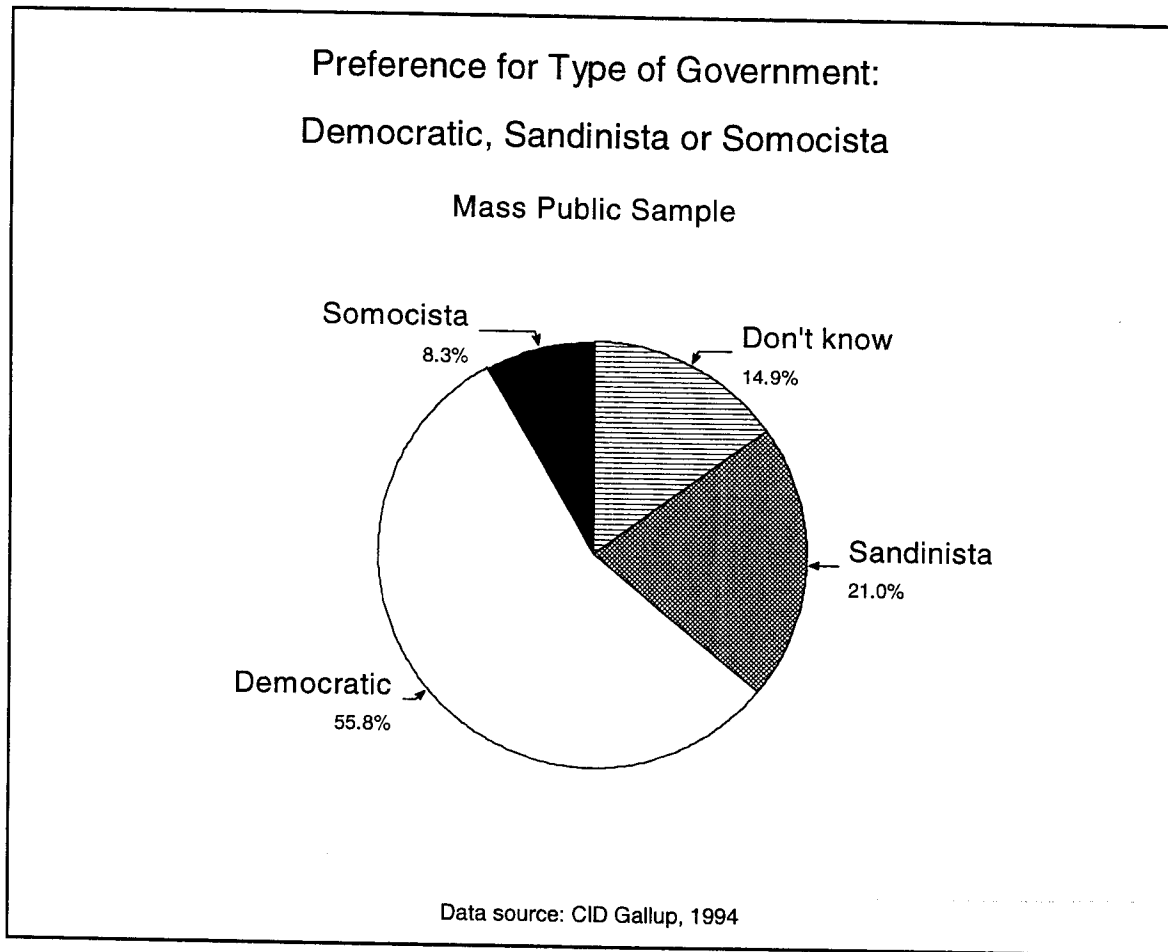


Figure 3.19

Chapter 4. Local Government and Democracy

Local governments have been operating in Central America since the colonial period and are institutions that are well known and widely accepted, if often criticized for their incompetence and lack of resources. Local governments are stable organizations that are likely to remain as a basic building block of government for decades if not centuries to come. Their role in promoting democracy has recently become the center of attention throughout Latin America, as decentralization plans focus more attention on previously ignored local governments. The link to democracy is clear, if not yet empirically tested: Municipal government officials regularly stand for elections in front of a constituency that has the ability to evaluate their performance at first hand. Municipal officials are now, in the days of competitive party politics in Central America, regularly thrown out of office for not performing their jobs well enough. In short, local governments are a vitally important component of democratic governance in Central America, and strengthening them implies strengthening the democratic process in the region.

Unfortunately, local governments have been little studied in Central America, or elsewhere for that matter. They are not "sexy," in that they normally only involve themselves in the most pedestrian of matters, such as paving streets and collecting trash. They are devoid of armies, air forces and ambassadors, and for that reason might seem to the outside observer to be very boring subjects of study. In fact, however, world-wide citizens have more contact with their local governments than they do with their national governments. As noted in chapter 1 of this study, Putnam's major study of democracy in Italy has demonstrated the centrality of local governments.¹ In Central America, where most citizens in rural areas do not pay income tax, in many cases their only contact with government is with local government.

Far less clear is the empirical relationship between local government and democratization. Other than the 1995 study of El Salvador by Seligson and Córdova, to my knowledge, there is no other study on the hypothesized relationship for the Central American countries, and I am not aware of any for South America either. What we have, instead, is speculation.²

¹Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

²One interesting descriptive study on Nicaragua is, *Experiencias innovadoras de participación ciudadana y gestión de gobierno local: el caso de Nicaragua*. San Salvador: FLACSO, Marzo de 1995.

I propose two hypotheses. The first is the one that is often articulated in development projects as a justification for expanding the capacity and authority of local government. This hypothesis suggests that if local government gains in capacity and authority, citizens will participate more in them, and as a result, citizens will make their governments more responsive and, ultimately, become more supportive of democracy. The second hypothesis is a variant on the first, and focuses less on the quantity of participation than on the quality. It suggests that unless citizens are satisfied with their local governments, they will not become more supportive of democracy. Furthermore, increased participation by itself may be an indication of greater satisfaction or greater dissatisfaction. All depends upon the responsiveness of local government to citizen demands. Indeed, if participation does not lead to satisfaction of demands, one should suspect that over time participation will decline and support for democracy will decline with it. This chapter tests that speculation with the 1994 and 1995 survey data. To anticipate, there is much support for the second hypothesis.

Background to the Questions

This chapter relies in part upon a set of ten questions that were developed in 1994 for USAID's Regional Housing and Urban Development Office (RHUDO) as part of a Central America-wide effort to measure local participation in and attitudes toward local government.³ It was decided to use those items in the University of Pittsburgh democratic values survey of 1995, dropping one item that did not seem to add much new information to the series. One of the remaining items, the one on voting for local government officials, was included in the section of the questionnaire that dealt with voting in congressional and presidential elections. In 1994, the series of questions was administered as part of a CID Gallup series of surveys as already reported in chapter 1 of this study.

³The author of this report was contracted by RHUDO, via its cooperative agreement with ICMA (International City/County Management Association) of Washington, D. C., to undertake a study of the opinions of Central Americans toward their local governments. In consultation with the RHUDO staff in Guatemala, a series of ten questionnaire items was drafted and the content agreed upon. A series of pre-tests of the items was conducted in each of the Central American countries. The pre-tests consisted of administration of the questions to respondents in both urban and rural areas. The pre-tests were conducted by experts in each country: Guatemala, Lic. Jorge Castillo Velarde of ASIES; El Salvador, Ricardo Córdova, Executive Director of FundaUngo; Honduras, Rafael Díaz Donaire of World Neighbors; Nicaragua, Andrew Stein, Universidad Centroamericana; Costa Rica, Lic. Miguel Gómez B., Professor of the University of Costa Rica; and Panama, Orlando Pérez, Ph.D. candidate, University of Pittsburgh and Research Associate of CELA (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos "Justo Arosemena"). Although the items are identical in content for each country, minor differences in questionnaire wording were necessitated to best reflect the terminology used in each of the six countries of the region. The final versions are included in the appendix of this study.

The Questions Asked on Local Government in the University of Pittsburgh Surveys

Participation

In democratic politics, citizens can choose to involve themselves with local government in three basic ways. First, they can attend meetings of the local government. Second, they can petition local government for assistance. Finally, they can vote in local elections. The survey included questions on each of these three forms of participation.

Attendance at local government meetings was measured by the following question:

Have you had the opportunity to attend a session or meeting convened by the municipality during the last 12 months?

The question varied somewhat depending upon the country. For example, in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, municipalities may hold open town meetings, called *cabildos abiertos*, in addition to regular municipal meetings. In other countries, regular and extraordinary meetings of municipal government are regularly held. There is also variation in terms of the openness of municipal government to citizen participation. For example, in El Salvador meetings have traditionally been closed to the public, but beginning in 1986 when the *cabildo abierto* was introduced as part of the new municipal code, this alternative mechanism for citizen participation was introduced.⁴

Attendance at a meeting does not necessarily mean that the individual is an active participant in that meeting. Citizens may go to such meetings merely to attend a community social event, or out of curiosity. In many other cases, community delegations attend the meetings to show solidarity with their community leader. All that can be known from this item is that the individual attended one or more meetings during the course of the year. Interpretation of the quality of participation is left to other questions in the study.

It is important to note that the one-year time frame for meeting attendance was selected so as to enable comparisons of participation levels from one year to the next. If the question had included a longer time frame, then a study done in the following year would not pick up variation (up or down) in recent local government participation. It is important to note, however, that individuals have difficulty recalling with precision their behavior of several months before. Therefore, the one-year time frame should be taken as a general guideline for participation.

⁴The "consulta popular" was also introduced. This is a form of local plebiscite, but one that has not been utilized with any frequency.

The second question in the participation series gets more directly at the question of active involvement. The question reads:

Have you asked for help or presented a petition to some office, employee, or official of the municipality during the last 12 months?

Here again, there is variation in the wording of this item across the six nations. In some countries the local officials are called "*municipes*," while in others they are called "*consejales*." The questionnaire used the terminology appropriate for each country.

Petitions and requests for help can be of two types: personal or communal. An individual can request that the municipality provide a building permit or a birth certificate. This would be an example of a personal request. On the other hand, there can be requests that a school room be constructed or a road be paved. This would be an illustration of a communal request. The current survey does not distinguish between these two types of activities, and it would be important to do so in future studies if more funding can be made available for a more extensive series of questions.

Voting, finally, is the quintessential form of participation in a democracy. In Central America, until the early 1980s, most elections (when they occurred) were manipulated and participation was limited. Only in Costa Rica is there a long history of free and fair elections. With the establishment of democratic procedures in each of the Central American countries in the 1980s, elections have become regular events, and most observers have found them to be free and fair. In this study the focus is on local elections. Election procedures vary throughout the region, but all allow for voters to cast a ballot for local officials. The question reads as follows:

Did you vote in the last elections for municipal candidates?

It is reasonable to anticipate variation in this item depending upon the date of the last election. For elections that occurred right before the survey was administered, respondents are more likely to recall casting their vote than those who voted several years before. People tend to forget about events that are far more momentous than voting, so one cannot expect great accuracy for recall beyond six months to a year.

Satisfaction

Participation in local government may bring rewards, it may bring frustration, or a combination of the two. Much depends upon the capacity and responsiveness of local government. In the series on participation, all that could be determined was the level of activity. With this series of items, one can measure the respondents' evaluation of municipal government.

The first item in this series is the most general:

Would you say that the services that the municipality is giving to the people are excellent, good, average, poor or very bad?

This is the first item in the ten-item set of questions that uses a five-point scale response format. The purpose of using such a scale is to go beyond a simple, "yes-no" dichotomy, and thus to allow for intensity of approval/disapproval. Researchers have found that five points are about ideal for capturing variation in public opinion; fewer points throw away real differences of opinion, whereas more points add little discriminating power to the measure.

The second item directly concerns the respondents' evaluation of the manner in which the municipality treats its clients. The item reads as follows:

How do you think that you or your neighbors have been treated when they have gone to the municipality to take care of some business? Did they treat you very well, well, average, badly or very badly?

In this item the focus is on the evaluation of routine matters that citizens need to carry out at their local governments. In many countries these matters include obtaining identity cards, paying for services such as trash collection, and obtaining birth and death certificates. The range of actions varies from country to country.

Legitimacy

A fundamental building block for democratic theory is that in order for there to be political stability, citizens must believe in the legitimacy of their governments. This is the belief that the political system, even when it makes decisions disliked by its citizens, has the basic right to be making those decisions and will be supported.

The concept of legitimacy has typically been utilized to study government at the national level. In Central America, where municipal government has almost always been overshadowed by far more powerful central governments, it is important to know if citizens perceive a legitimate role for their local governments. It would not be surprising to find that some Central Americans find local government superfluous. On the other hand, irresponsible and/or repressive central governments may be so disliked that some Central Americans would prefer to increase local government power and authority at the expense of central government. This series of four items was designed to measure these sentiments.

The first item directly compares local and national government:

In your opinion, who has responded better to help resolve the problems of this community? Would it be the central government, the national legislators or the municipality?

The motivation for providing three options, including national legislators (*diputados*), is that pre-tests of the item demonstrated that some citizens made a clear distinction between their central government and their national legislators. When the item is analyzed to explore the central/local distinction, however, central government and legislators are combined into a single option. For the remainder of the analysis, however, the three separate responses are retained. The response format also allowed for the options "neither" and "all are equal." These responses emerged in pre-testing and for the purpose of establishing dimensionality (see below) are collapsed into the non-local response.

The next item in the legitimacy series attempts to measure the extent to which citizens would rather see a stronger local government or would instead prefer a stronger central government. The item reads:

In your opinion, should local government be given more responsibility and more funding, or should we let the central government assume more responsibilities and municipal services?

The response format allowed for two additional replies, neither of which was read to the respondent: "don't change anything," and "more to the municipality if it gives better service."

It is one thing to demand a better local government and it is quite another to be willing to pay for it. In the following item, the respondents were, in effect, being asked to "put their money where their mouth is." They were asked:

Would you be willing to pay more taxes to the municipality to enable it to provide better service or do you think that it is not worth it to pay more?

The final item in this series attempts to provide an overall evaluation of the legitimacy of municipal government. The focus is on the responsiveness of local government to popular demands. The item reads as follows:

Do you think that the municipal officers and the mayor of this municipality are responsive to what the people want almost always, the majority of the time, once in a while, almost never or never?

Once again the five-item response category is employed in this item in order to finely grade the sentiments of those interviewed.

Participation in Local Government

Attendance at Meetings

The most basic information we have comes from the first item in the 1994 Central America-wide survey, one that measures attendance at the meetings of the municipality. In that survey, 11.3 per cent of those interviewed had attended a municipal meeting during the 12 months prior to the survey. El Salvador stood out as having significantly more attendance than any other country in the region. We attributed that difference to the successful *cabildo abierto* program and the stimulation of the funds available via the Municipalities in Action program (MEA).⁵ Figure 4.1 presents the results of a direct comparison of the 1994 and the 1995 surveys.

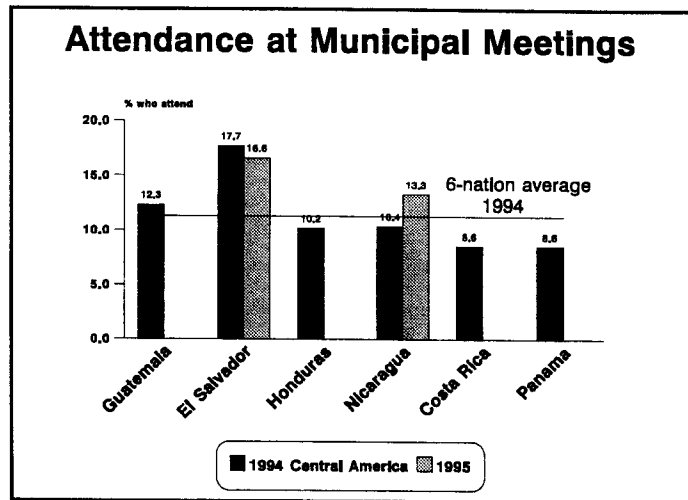
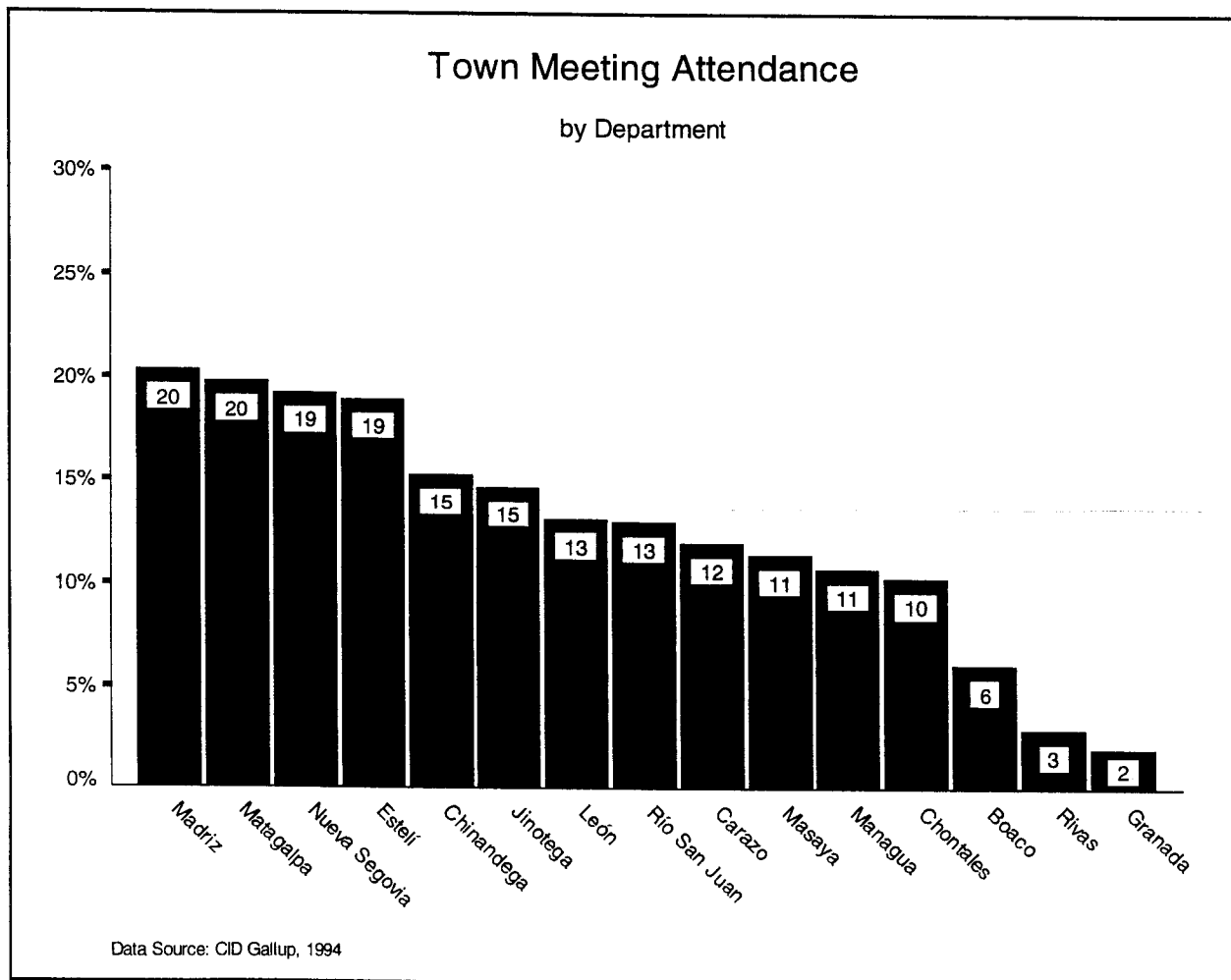


Figure 4.1

In Nicaragua somewhat different results emerge between 1994 and 1995. While the level of municipal participation in Nicaragua does not match that of El Salvador, there appears to be a trend in the direction of greater participation. The 1995 University of Pittsburgh survey shows a significantly higher level of municipal meeting attendance than the 1994 Gallup survey. It is possible that this difference is merely an artifact of the different samples designs, or a function of a real increase in participation. Only by tracking this variable over time will we know for sure.

⁵For details see Seligson, 1994 and Blair *et al.*, 1995.

Now that the overall level of municipal meeting attendance has been established for Nicaragua and the other countries in Central America, it is appropriate to turn to internal comparisons. First, participation by department is examined. In order to do this the 1994 Gallup survey is used rather than the 1995 University of Pittsburgh survey because the larger sample size of the former increases the accuracy of results produced by the sample. The Gallup survey, however, used a somewhat different question from the 1995 survey. The Pittsburgh survey, as noted above, asked about attendance at "cabildos abiertos," municipal sessions or other meetings called by the municipality during the prior 12 months. The Gallup survey also refers to the same one year period, and also refers to the "cabildo abiertos," but limits itself to those kinds of meetings, excluding other kinds of municipal meetings. For the combined samples of the mass public and special groups, 15% of Nicaraguans attended such meetings, a figure higher than the University of Pittsburgh sample. However, when the mass public sample is examined alone, the result is 13%, virtually identical to the 1995 University of Pittsburgh study. The exclusion of the special

**Figure 4.2**

groups, many of whom have rather high levels of participation as will be seen below, is responsible for lowering the overall result. In sum, even though the wording of the question was somewhat different, the results of the two surveys are nearly identical.⁶

The data shown in Figure 4.2 reveal a rather wide variation in municipal attendance across Nicaragua's departments. At one extreme are Madriz, Matagalpa, Nueva Segovia and Estelí, with about one-fifth of the respondents saying that they had attended a local government meeting within the last year. At the other extreme are Rivas and Granada, where only 2-3% of the population has attended such meetings. In the middle, with about one in ten attending is Managua and several other departments. This variation is difficult to explain without other information, but certainly should become a subject of study for those interested in increasing local government participation as well as those interested in decentralization. It would appear that in some areas of Nicaragua local governments are far more successful than others in attracting their citizens to participate in local government; the ratio of the highest to the lowest is ten to one. Departments like Rivas and Granada need to study areas like Madriz and Matagalpa.

Gender differences have emerged in a number of prior analyses, but the initial examination of this variable and municipal participation does not seem to show important effects. Gender differences are displayed in figure 4.3. The differences are not extreme, with males exceeding females by only about 2 percent. Yet, as will be shown below, these similarities mask important gender differences by department and by education.

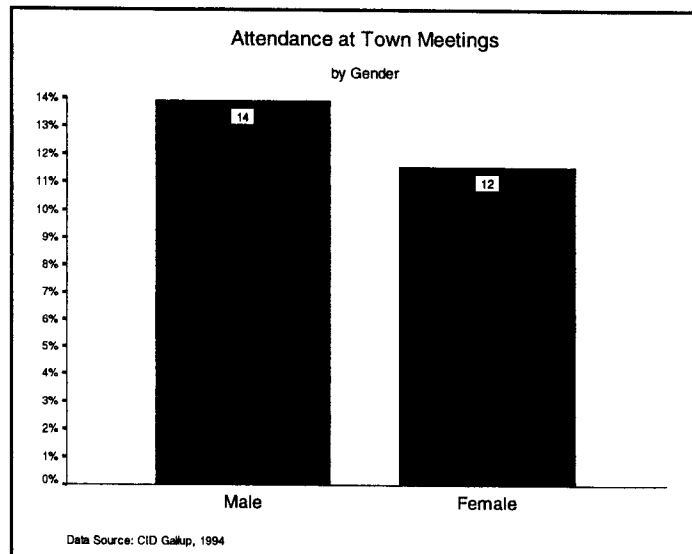


Figure 4.3

⁶The Gallup survey also asked about frequency of attendance. As expected, the political leader sample showed far more frequent attendance, averaging nearly 2 meetings per year, and journalists averaged .9 meetings per year. The remainder of the groups as well as the mass public were much lower, averaging only .2 meetings per year. These averages are calculated by counting a zero for those who did not attend any meetings during the year.

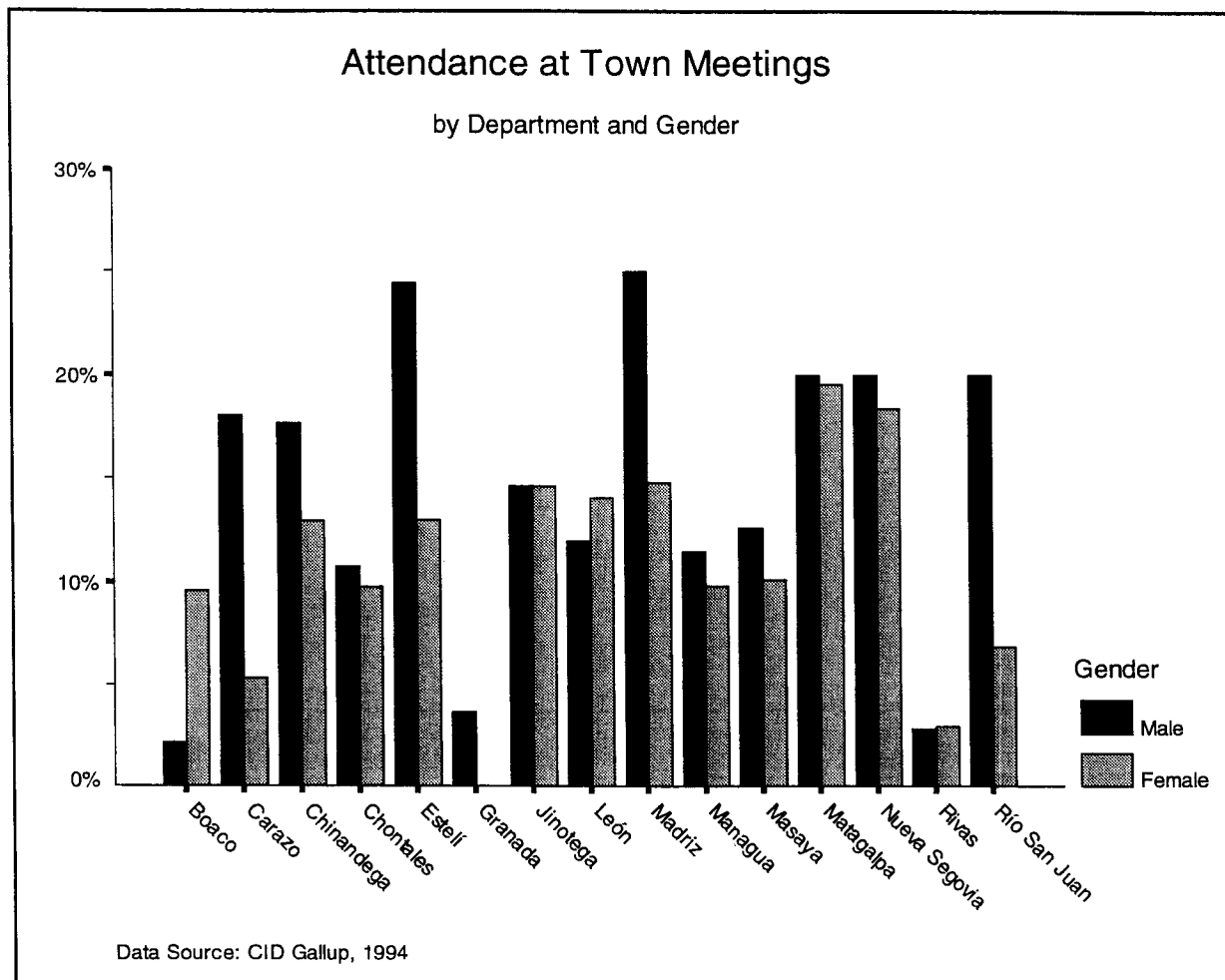


Figure 4.4

More revealing than the global male/female differences are the patterns uncovered by an examination of gender-based participation broken down by department. As shown in Figure 4.4, there is very wide variation, from departments such as Jinotega in which there is virtually no variation by gender, to Madriz, Estelí, Río San Juan and Carazo in which males are far more active. Finally, the reverse pattern is found in Boaco, where females greatly exceed males in their level of municipal participation.

Education has been found, world-wide, to stimulate political participation of citizens. In El Salvador, it was found that, generally speaking, more highly educated Salvadorans tend to participate more actively in municipal government, but the relationship was not uniform. In Nicaragua, the interrelationship of gender and education is very interesting. As is shown in Figure 4.5 participation does increase for both males and females as educational levels move from none through secondary school. But there the relationship

is reversed rather strongly for men, but continues even more strongly for women. That is, among university educated Nicaraguan males, municipal town meeting participation *declines*, whereas among Nicaraguan females, such participation strongly increases. Indeed, Nicaraguan university educated females participate at rates far higher than do Nicaraguan university educated males. It is now clear that the overall male/female differences shown above are relevant only for those with less than a university education, with the pattern being reversed among those with university education.

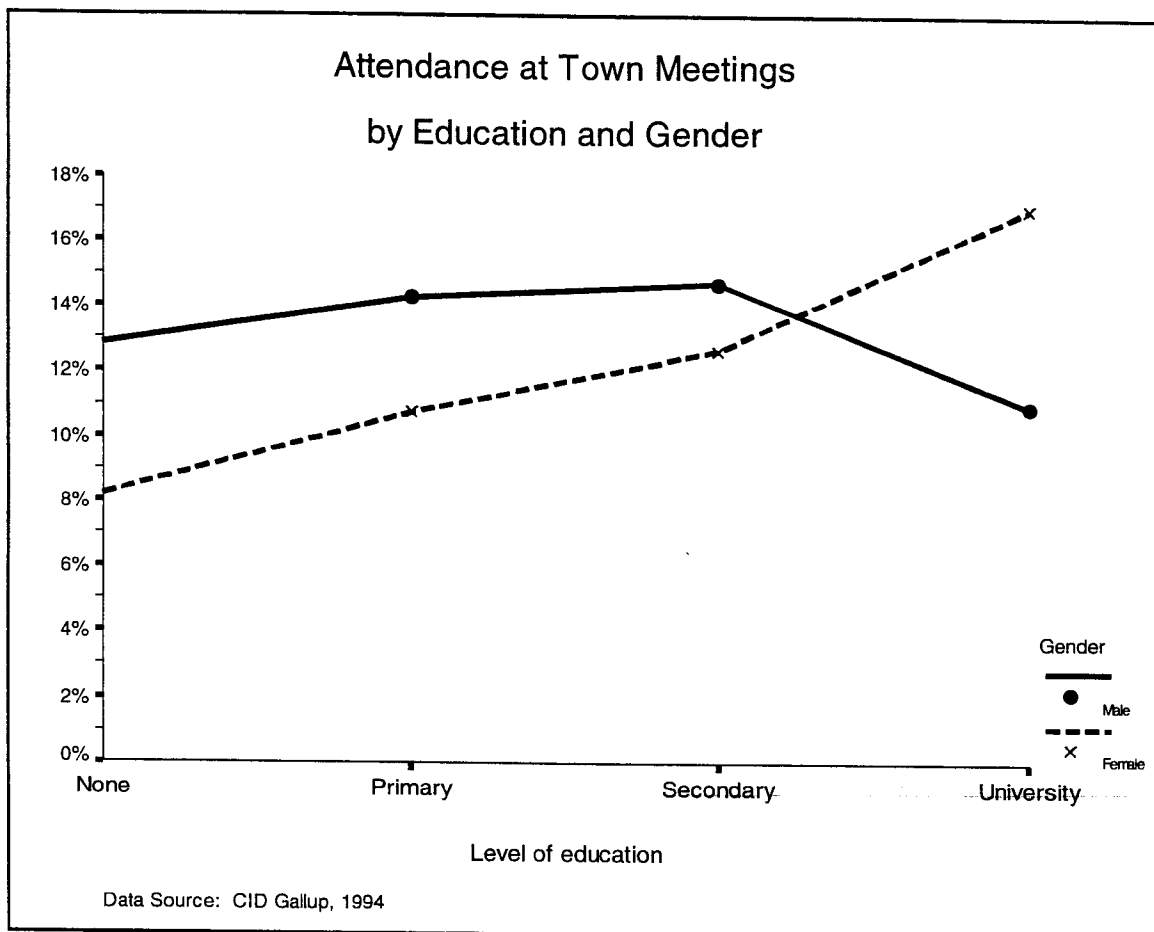


Figure 4.5

Attendance at Municipal Meetings and Democratic Norms

One might assume that attendance at local government meetings is associated with system support and political tolerance. The assumption is that attending such meetings can show citizens that governments really care about them, and it can also help to show citizens how to become tolerant through the process of engaging in community discussion

and debate. In the earlier study of El Salvador no such finding was encountered, however, nor does such a finding emerge in Nicaragua. There is no statistically significant association between participation in local government and tolerance or system support in either the 1995 University of Pittsburgh study or the 1994 Gallup survey. This is certainly disappointing, since we would have hoped that increased local government participation would lead to or be responsible for greater system support and tolerance. Nonetheless, it is important to face up to the reality that in Central America at least, it does not appear that attendance at local government meetings is linked to the two key dimensions of democracy under study here. Yet, as I will show below, there is a direct connection between attitudes toward local government and system support, but the relationship is not with participation but with satisfaction with their performance.

Requests for Assistance from Local Government

Attending a municipal meeting is not the same as demand making. The latter is the more active form of political participation. In 1994, Nicaraguans made fewer requests from their local government than did the citizens of any other country in the region, but the difference between Nicaragua and El Salvador was trivial. As can be seen in figure 4.6, the 1994 Gallup survey and the 1995 University of Pittsburgh survey uncovered virtually identical results in El Salvador for the two national samples. Such consistency gives one confidence in the reliability of the survey. Substantively, however, we see that the high level of municipal participation found in El Salvador did not translate into a high level of demand-making. El Salvador's level is the second lowest in Central America, higher only than Nicaragua, and far lower than Costa Rica, the region's leader.

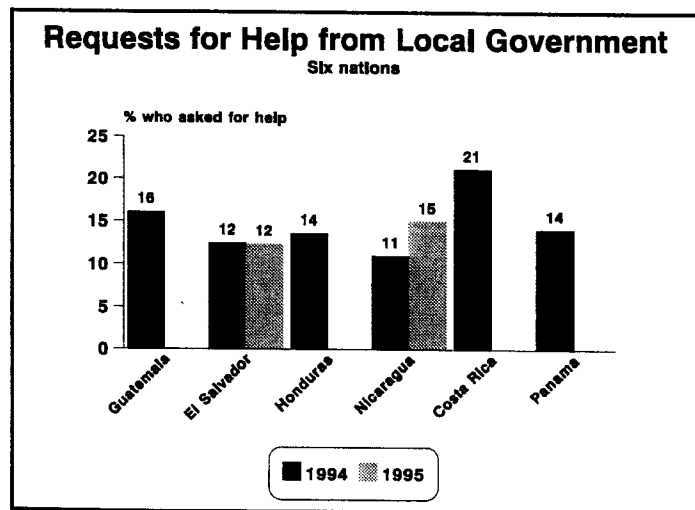


Figure 4.6

The 1995 University of Pittsburgh survey of Nicaragua did, however, uncover a significant increase in demand-making by the citizens of that country. Demands increased from 11% to 15%. Again, we cannot be certain that the result is a product of real change or an artifact of the sample design, but again, the results are encouraging. The 1995 totals place Nicaragua ahead of El Salvador, Honduras and Panama, and nearly tied with

Guatemala. Nonetheless, Nicaragua's level of municipal demand-making still lags far behind the region's leader, Costa Rica.

Major differences emerge in the national pattern when the data are broken down by department and gender. As can be seen in Figure 5.6, some departments have very high levels of demand-making; 40% of males in Chontales have made demands on municipal government, whereas in Rivas, only one in ten have done so. In half of the departments, males are more likely to make demands than females, but in Matagalpa, Masaya, Leon, Jinotega, Managua and Rivas, females are more active. No data are presented for Nueva Segovia because the incidence of this form of participation was too small to be reported upon reliably given the small sample size.

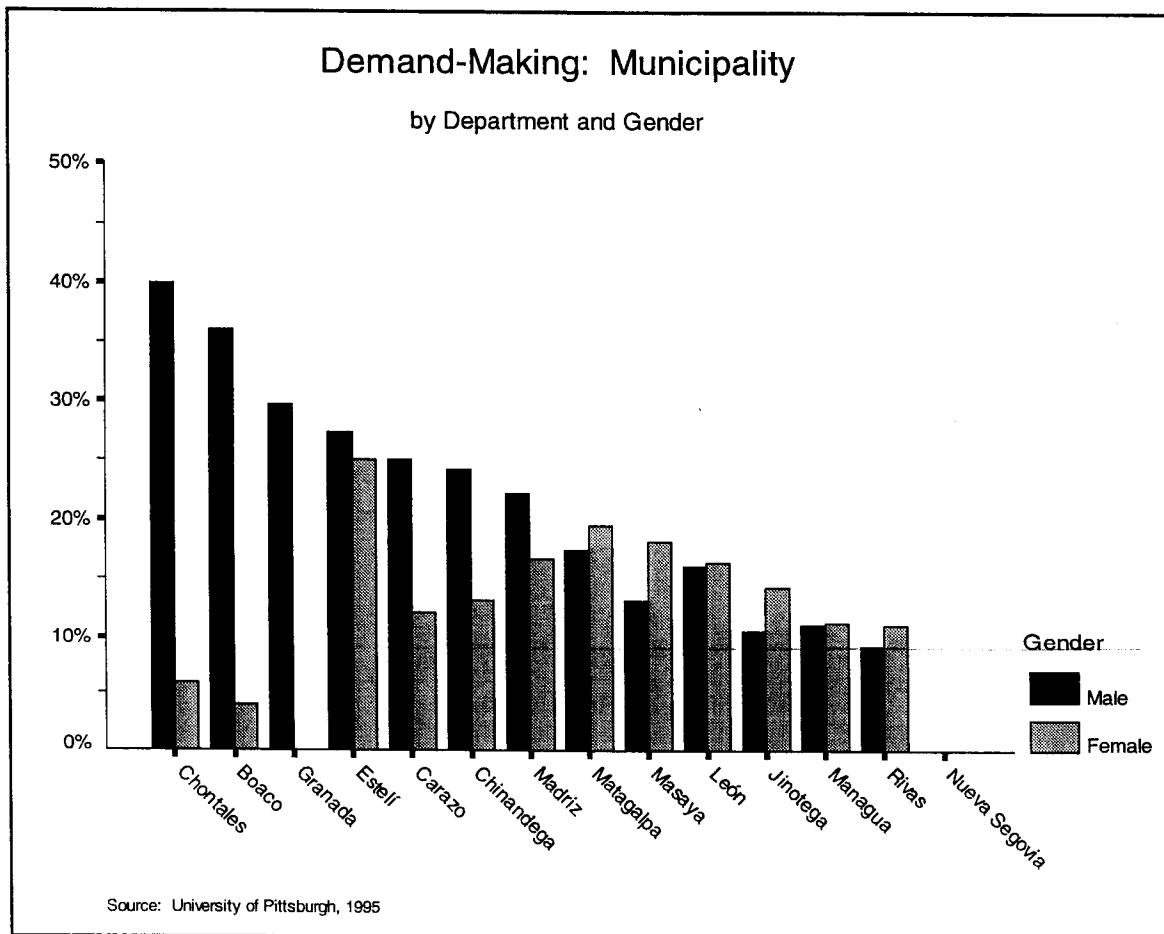


Figure 4.7

Gender and education both play a role in demand-making at the municipal level, and the patterns are very interesting. When no distinctions are made for gender, as can be seen in Figure 4.8, the higher the level of education, the greater the demand-making.

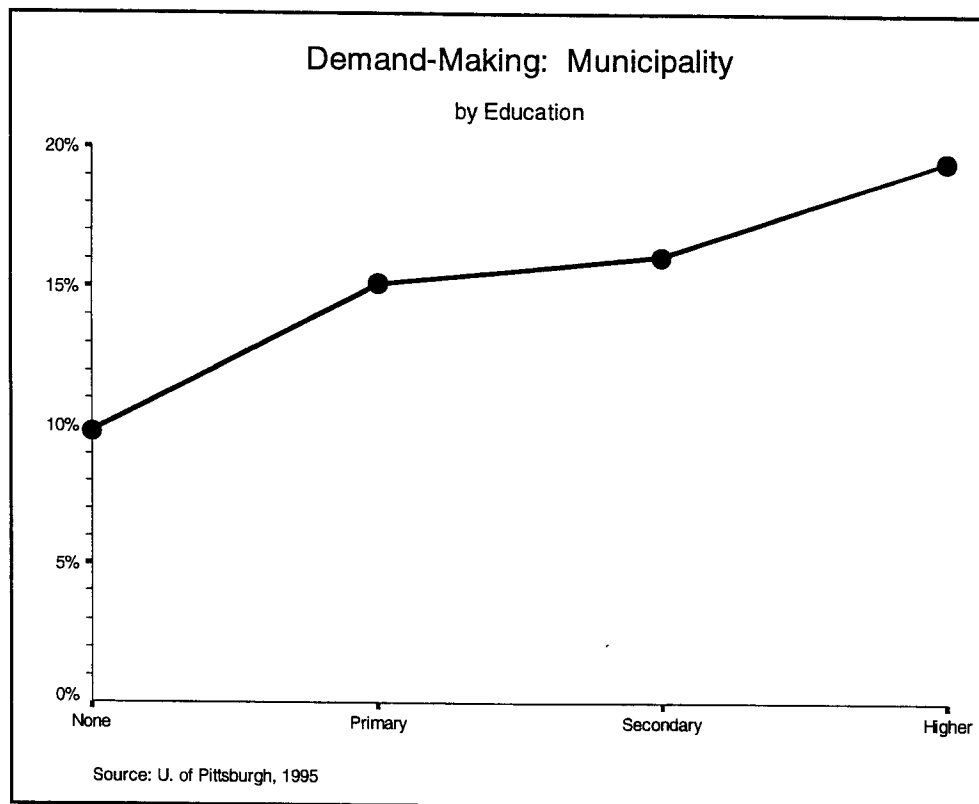


Figure 4.8

The linear pattern found in the relationship between education and demand-making participation at the local level is broken, however, when we examine the relationship controlled for gender. As can be seen in Figure 4.9, at the level of university education, female demand-making does not increase above that of high

school, whereas male demand-making continues on a sharply upward track. This finding

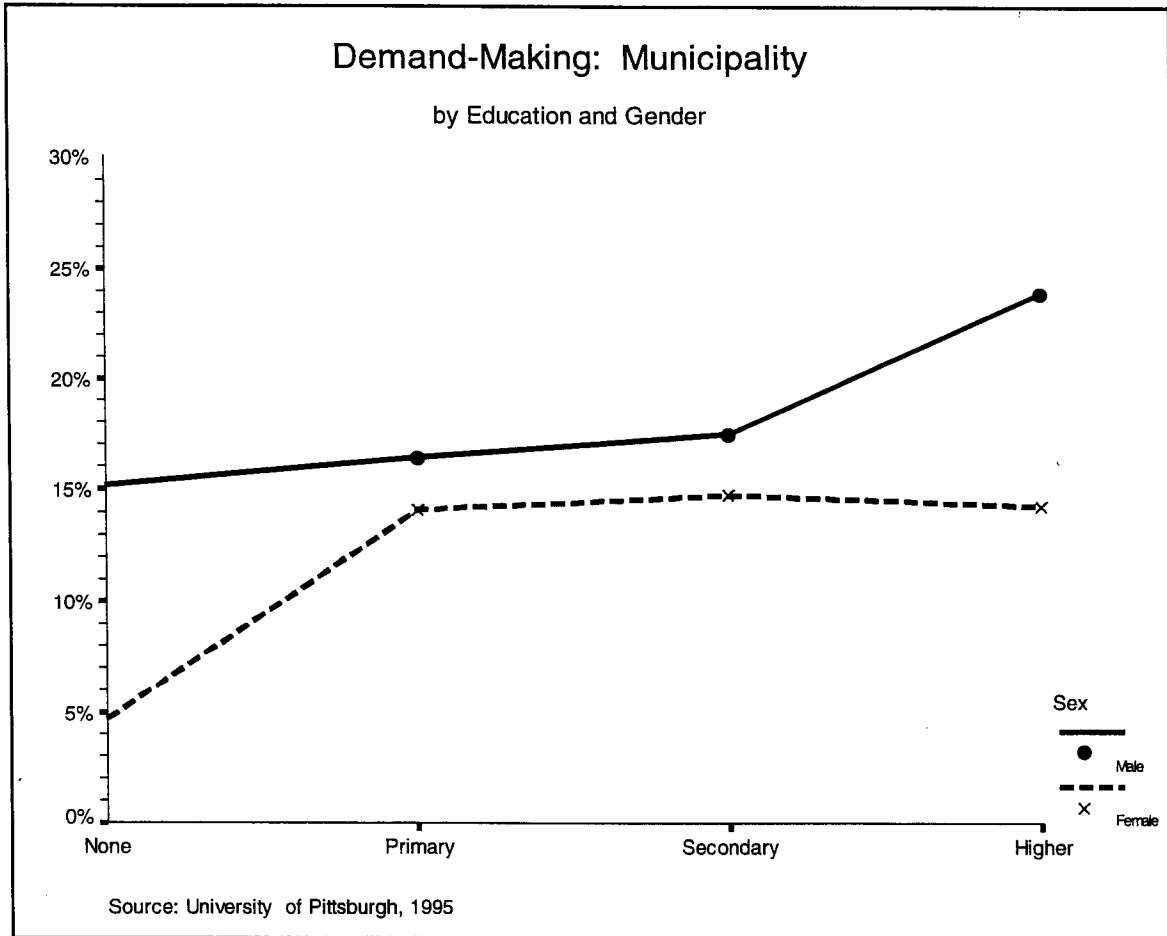


Figure 4.9

is in direct contrast to attendance at municipal town meetings that was discussed earlier. There women were found to be participating at *higher* levels as their education increased, a trend that continued right through university education, while male participation declined at the university level. Participation at meetings, however, is only a very limited form of political participation since one can attend but remain silent. Apparently, in Nicaragua, it is highly educated male participants who speak out and make demands of their local governments at levels higher than any other group, male or female, of any level of education. Having demand-making participation for the various special samples for the 1994 Gallup survey would have been ideal, but the questions were not asked either in the special samples or in the mass public survey.

If one runs a linear correlation coefficient for age and demand-making, no relationship is found. But that is not because of the absence of any relationship but rather because the relationship is curvilinear. It has frequently been found that many forms of political participation are low among the youngest and oldest members of a population, and peak in the middle-ages. That is because the young have no stake in politics and the old are often psychologically detached or too ill to participate. But among those in the middle, who often have growing children, developing businesses, etc., participation can be quite high. This is precisely the pattern we find in Nicaragua as is shown in Figure 4.10.

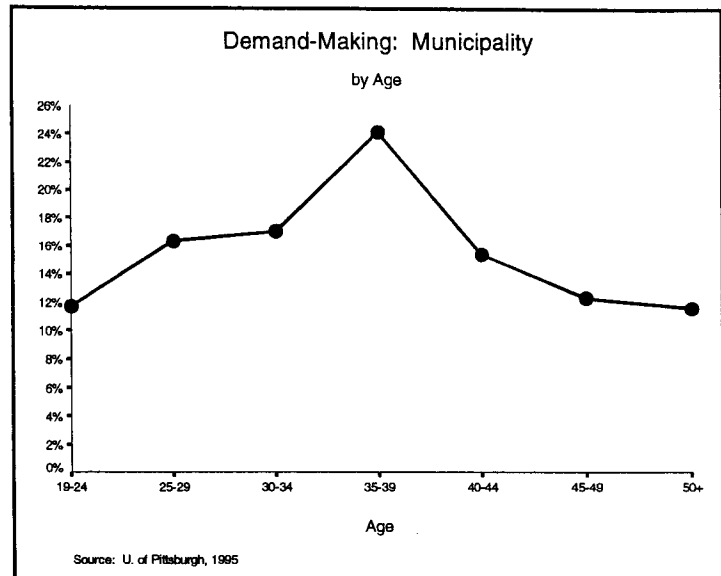


Figure 4.10

Demand-making, like attendance at municipal meetings, has no link to our two central variables of democratic stability. There is no correlation between making a demand on local government and system support or tolerance. Again, however, this does not mean that there is no connection between local government and democratic stability, as we shall see when we examine satisfaction with local government.

Satisfaction with Local Government

Participation in local government does not necessarily lead to satisfaction with it. How satisfied are Nicaraguans with their local governments? Figure 4.11 displays the results from the 1994 national municipal study conducted in Central America. As can be seen, in terms of satisfaction with services and treatment, Nicaragua ranks about in the middle of the six countries.

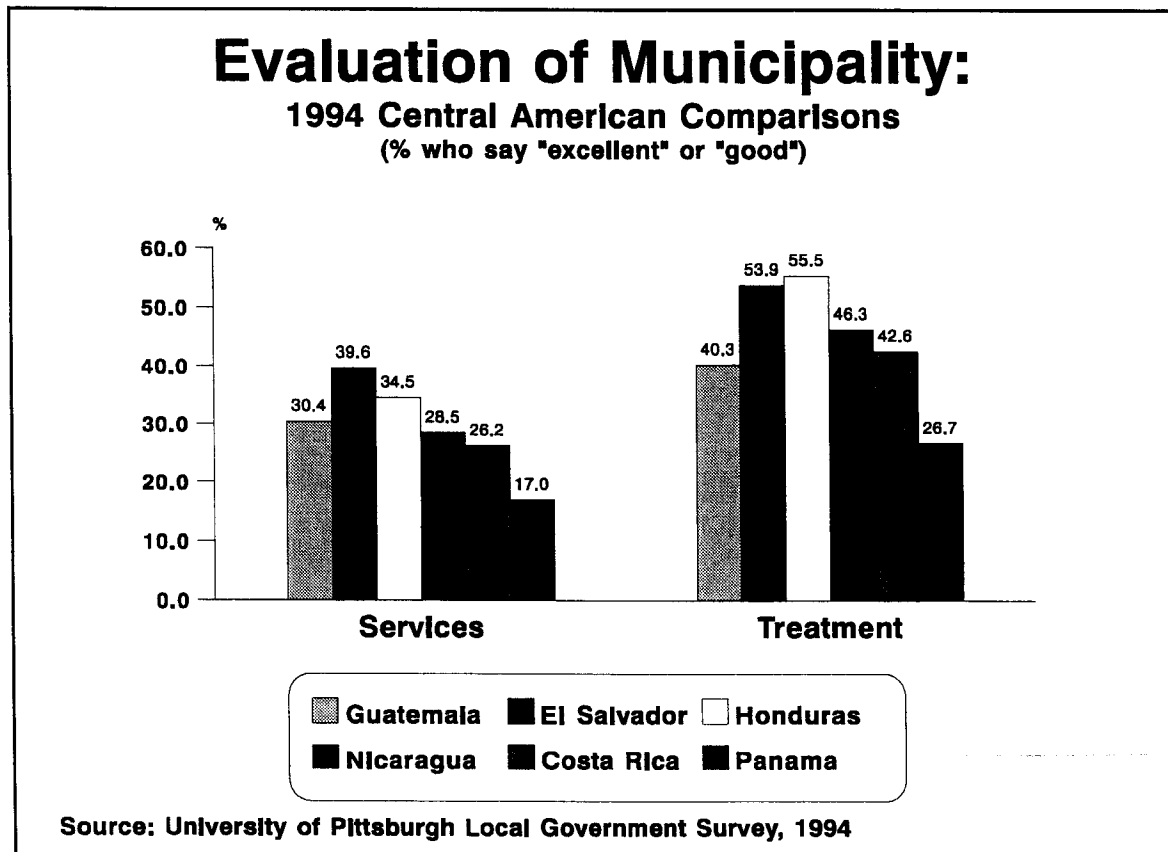


Figure 4.11

Internal comparisons within Nicaragua are revealing (see figure 4.12). Here the original five-point scale of the questions (very satisfied to very dissatisfied) have been recoded on a scale of 0-100, in order to make the data more easily comparable to other charts in this study.

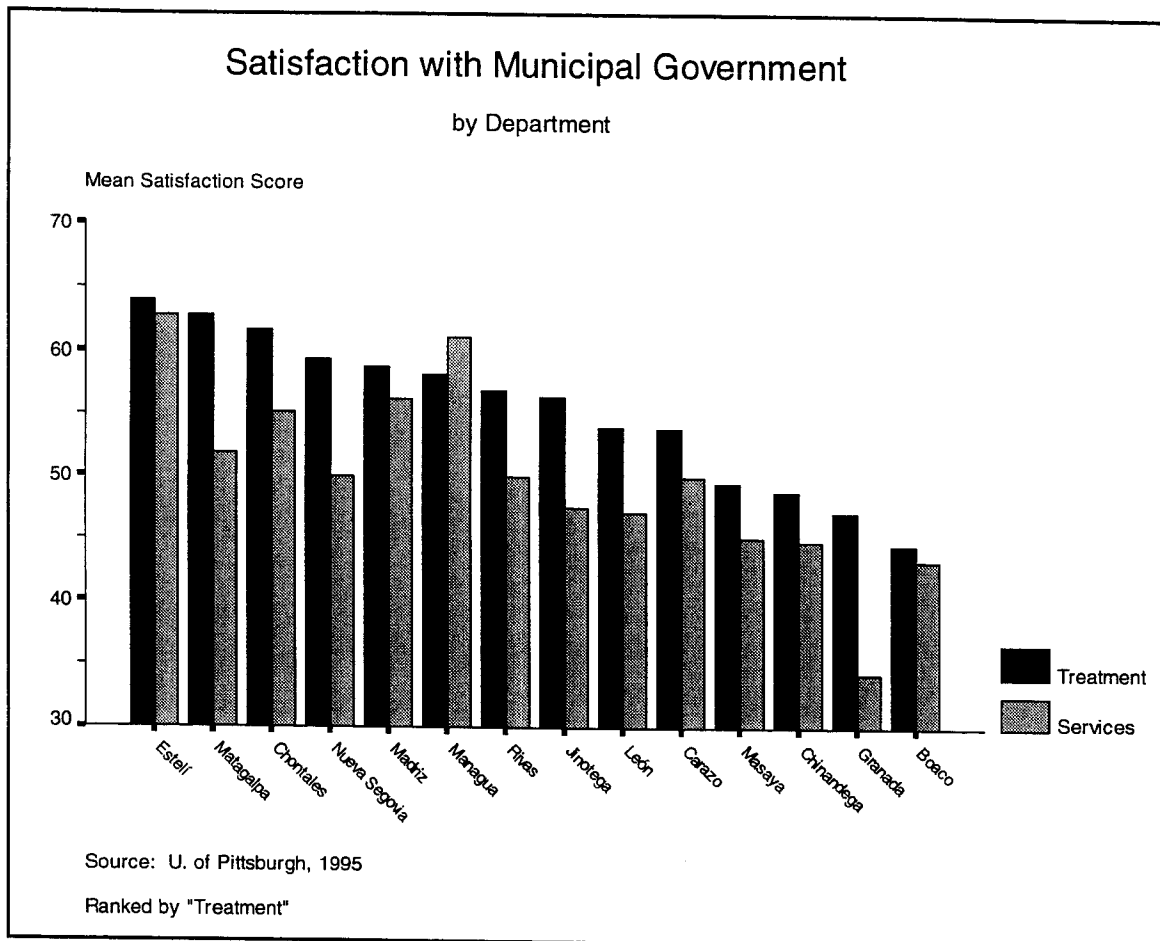


Figure 4.12

Satisfaction with municipal services and treatment varies by department, with the most negative evaluations emerging in Bocaco and the most positive in Estelí, Matagalpa and Chontales. It is interesting to note that in all but one department (Managua), citizens are more satisfied with the treatment they receive than with the services they get. In Managua the situation is reversed, but the difference is very small.

Age has no significant association with satisfaction. While females are significantly more satisfied with municipal government than are males, the differences are not large between the sexes. Education is significantly correlated (sig. = .003) with satisfaction with municipal services, but the strength of association is weak ($r = .09$), indicating that those with more education are only slightly more likely to be favorable to municipal government than those with less education. In short, demographic and socio-economic variables do

not tell us much about satisfaction with local government. But political variables do, as we shall see below.

Evaluation of Municipalities and Democratic Norms

Much of USAID's effort in municipal development programs in Central America has been focused on increasing citizen participation. In this study we have carefully examined such participation, both within Nicaragua and in comparative perspective. Yet, it should be obvious that citizens can take different lessons from their participatory experiences. Some may attend a *cabildo abierto* and be very content with the outcome and as a result develop a commitment to this crucial institution of local democracy. Others, however, may be frustrated or even angered by the experience. We need to know more than the level of citizen participation in local government; we need to know the degree of satisfaction with local government. Furthermore, we need to know if that satisfaction is linked to system support at the national level. Using the data, that question can be answered.

Are there linkages between participation and positive evaluations? Not in Nicaragua. Participation in local government meetings has no significant correlation with satisfaction with treatment by municipal officials and a *significant negative* correlation ($r = -.07$, $\text{sig} = .02$) with evaluation of municipal services. While significant, this association is very weak. We further found no significant correlation at all between making demands on the municipality and satisfaction with services or treatment. These findings are virtually identical to what we discovered in El Salvador, supporting quite clearly the suspicion that participation per se might not be linked to greater support for the national system of government (i.e., system support). In fact, as noted above, *there is no significant correlation whatsoever between participation in local government and system support.*

In contrast, *there is clear evidence that evaluation of local government is linked to system support at the national level.* In particular, positive evaluations of municipal services and perception of treatment by local government are directly linked to higher system support, as is shown in Figures 4.13 and 4.14. These two variables are correlated at $r = .21$ and $.16$ ($\text{sig} < .001$) respectively, indicating a moderate association. The same pattern of relationships was discovered in the analysis conducted on the El Salvador data set. This is an important finding since it is a clear sign that those individuals who feel that they are better treated by their local governments, as well as those who have a positive evaluation of local government services, are stronger supporters of the Nicaraguan system of government. The data, therefore, demonstrate a link between local level government and national government in the minds of Nicaraguans.

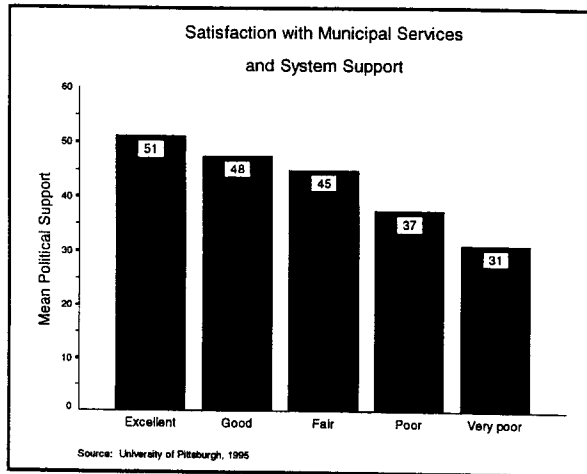


Figure 4.13

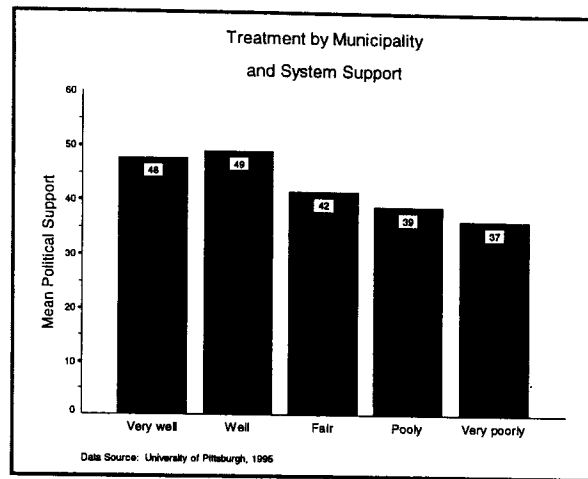


Figure 4.14

Further evidence of the linkage between satisfaction with local government and system support is shown in Figures 4.15 and 4.16. Figure 4.15 shows that citizens of Nicaragua who are more willing to pay increased local taxes are more supportive of the national system.

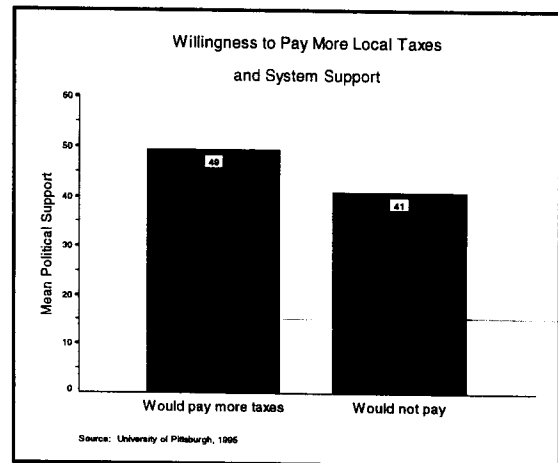
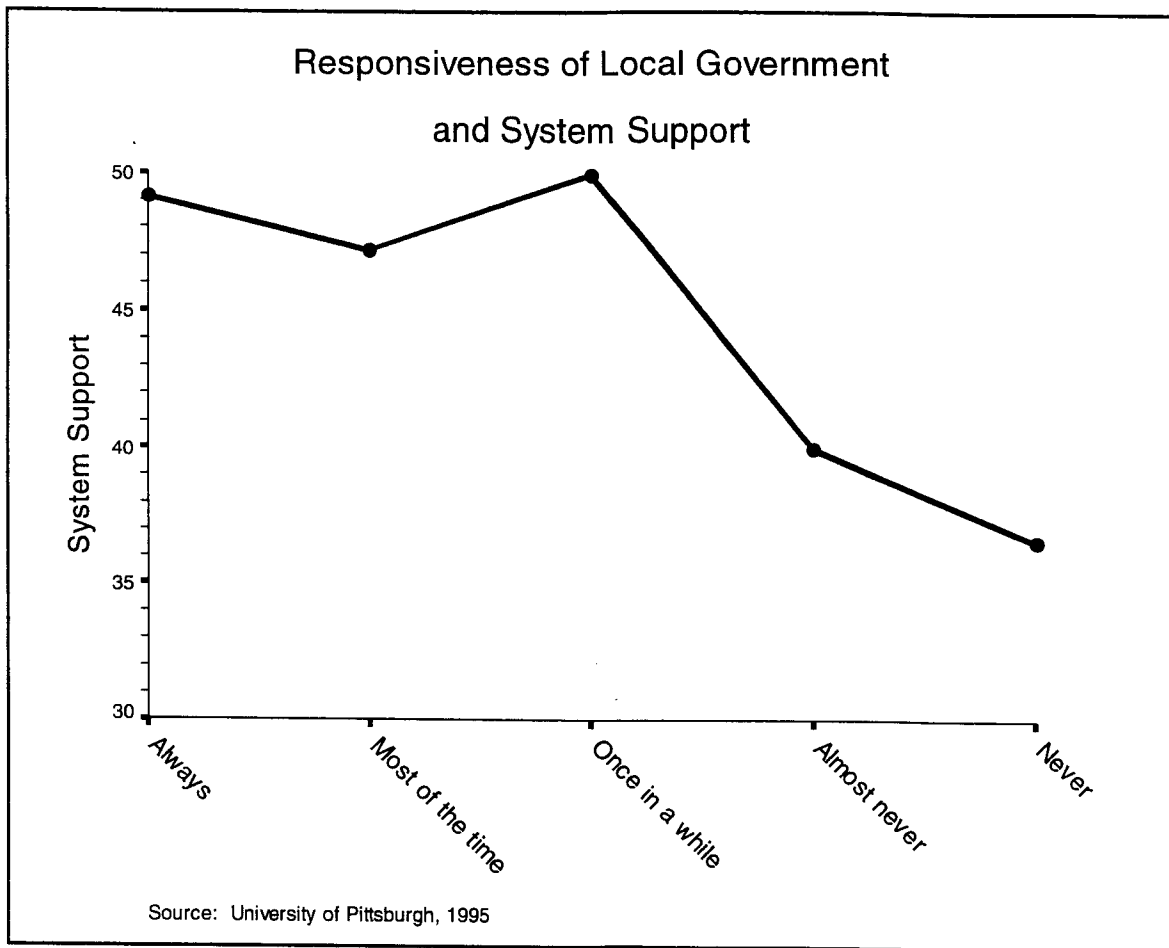


Figure 4.15

Figure 4.16 shows that citizens who believe their municipal officials are responsive to the wishes of citizens are more likely to be supportive of the national system. We found that there is a significant correlation ($r = .22$, $\text{sig} < .001$) between system support and perceived responsiveness of local officials (see figure 4.16). This is identical to the pattern we uncovered in our exploration of satisfaction with local government and shows a clear pattern of relationship between satisfaction and system support. It is also identical to the pattern uncovered in El Salvador.

**Figure 4.16**

Since it is local government with which citizens have far more contact than national government, it may be safe to assume that it is favorable evaluations at the local level that are driving system support at the national level, although we cannot be certain. However, in order to verify this empirically, we are faced with a complex methodological problem. Recall that we are dealing with cross-sectional data, i.e., a "snapshot" of public opinion. In order to establish causality, it is normally necessary to have a panel design, in which we interview the same individuals over a period of time and see how their attitudes change. It is possible, however, even when limited to cross-sectional data to make reasonably firm assertions about the direction of causality using a technique called "two-stage least

squares regression."⁷ I applied that technique to the data, focusing on two variables: the scale of system support and satisfaction with municipal government.

In order to be able to determine the direction of causality, it is necessary to locate what are known as "instrumental variables," ones that are correlated with system support, but not with satisfaction with local government, and other variables that are correlated with satisfaction with local government but not with system support. Ideology and evaluation of the incumbent administration (L1 and M1) are associated with system support, but not with satisfaction with local government. On the other hand, education, wealth, attention to news in the mass media (TV and newspapers) are all associated with satisfaction with local government but not with system support.

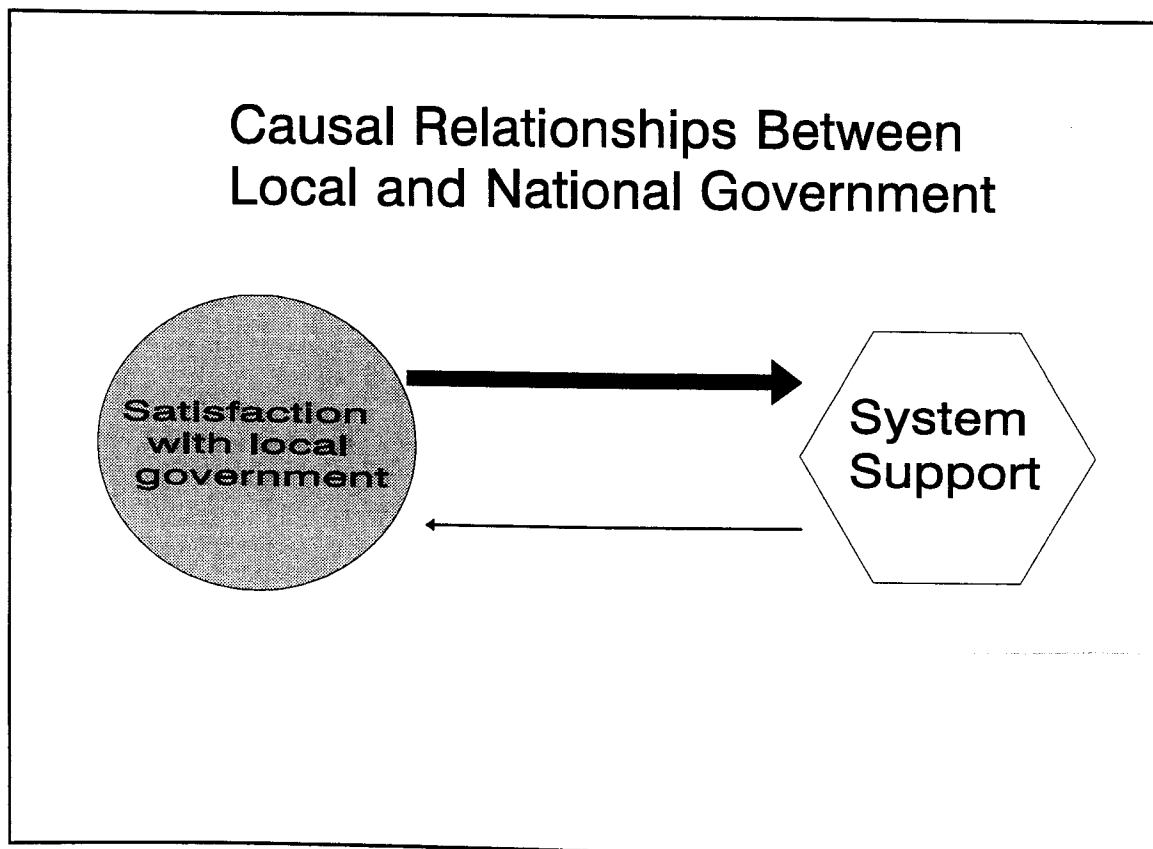


Figure 4.17

These "instrumental" variables are included in an analysis to determine the direction of causality. The findings are, as suspected, that satisfaction with local government leads to increased system support, as is shown schematically in figure 4.17. Furthermore, there

⁷I would like to thank Professor Steve Finkel of the University of Virginia for his advice on this section.

is a "reciprocal" relationship in operation, such that increased system support tends to feed back into increased satisfaction with local government.⁸

These results show quite clearly, therefore, that it was not participation by itself that was key to increased system support, but satisfaction with local government. The lesson is clear: local governments must "deliver" and satisfy their constituents if they expect to be supported.

Legitimacy of Local Government versus National Government

Which Government Responds Better?

Nearly a majority of Nicaraguans believe that their municipalities respond better to community problems than does the national government. Indeed, they believe that municipalities have responded better than any other level of government. The results are shown in figure 4.18. It is surprising to find the very small proportion of Nicaraguans who believe that their elected national officials, the *diputados*, respond well to local problems. Yet, it must be recalled that Nicaragua does not have single member district representation, so the *diputados* do not really represent their local constituencies. As a result, citizens are quite correct in thinking that they must solve their problems through their local government.

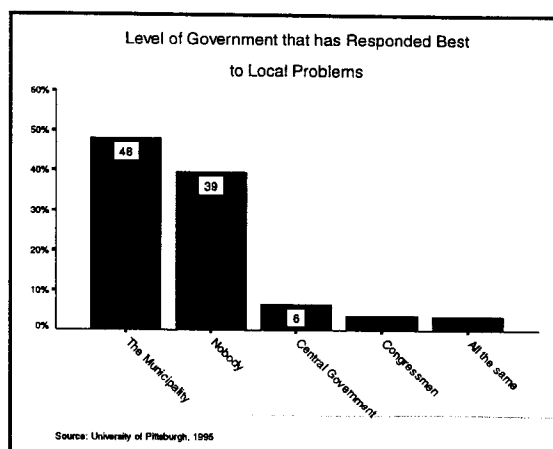


Figure 4.18

Support for Strengthening Local Government

The respondents were also asked if they felt that local government should be given more responsibility and more income or should the central government take over more municipal services. As can be seen in figure 4.19, a majority prefer an increase in

⁸We should stress that only through a panel design can we be completely confident that this causal analysis accurately describes the observed correlations.

municipal strength, while only less than one in five Nicaraguans would prefer more central government responsibility over local matters.

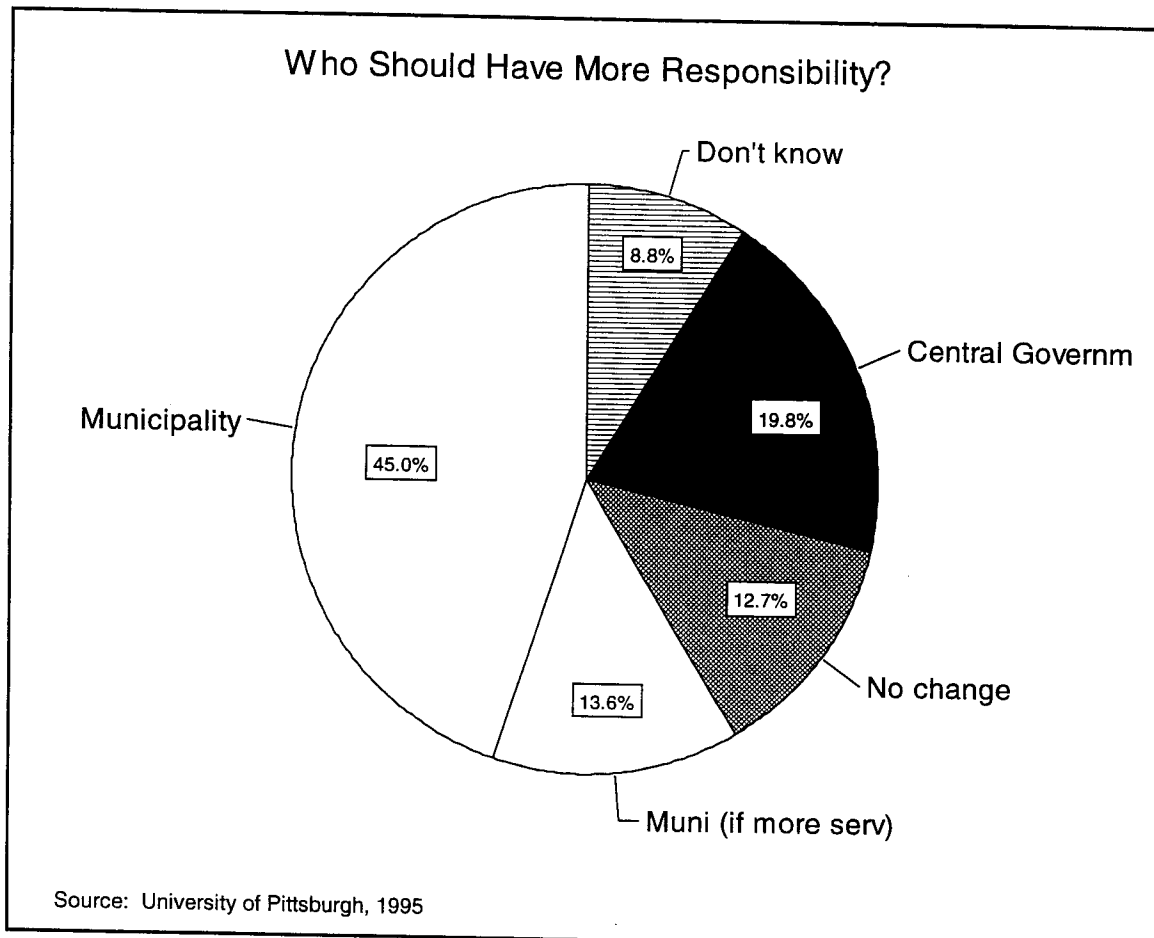


Figure 4.19

The pattern of support for increased strength of local government is shown in Figure 4.20. There is not a great deal of variation on this item by department, with the exception of Estelí, in which the male population is nearly unanimous in preferring more municipal responsibility. Gender differences are also not great, but except for Nueva Segovia, Managua and Jinotega, males prefer more local control than females.

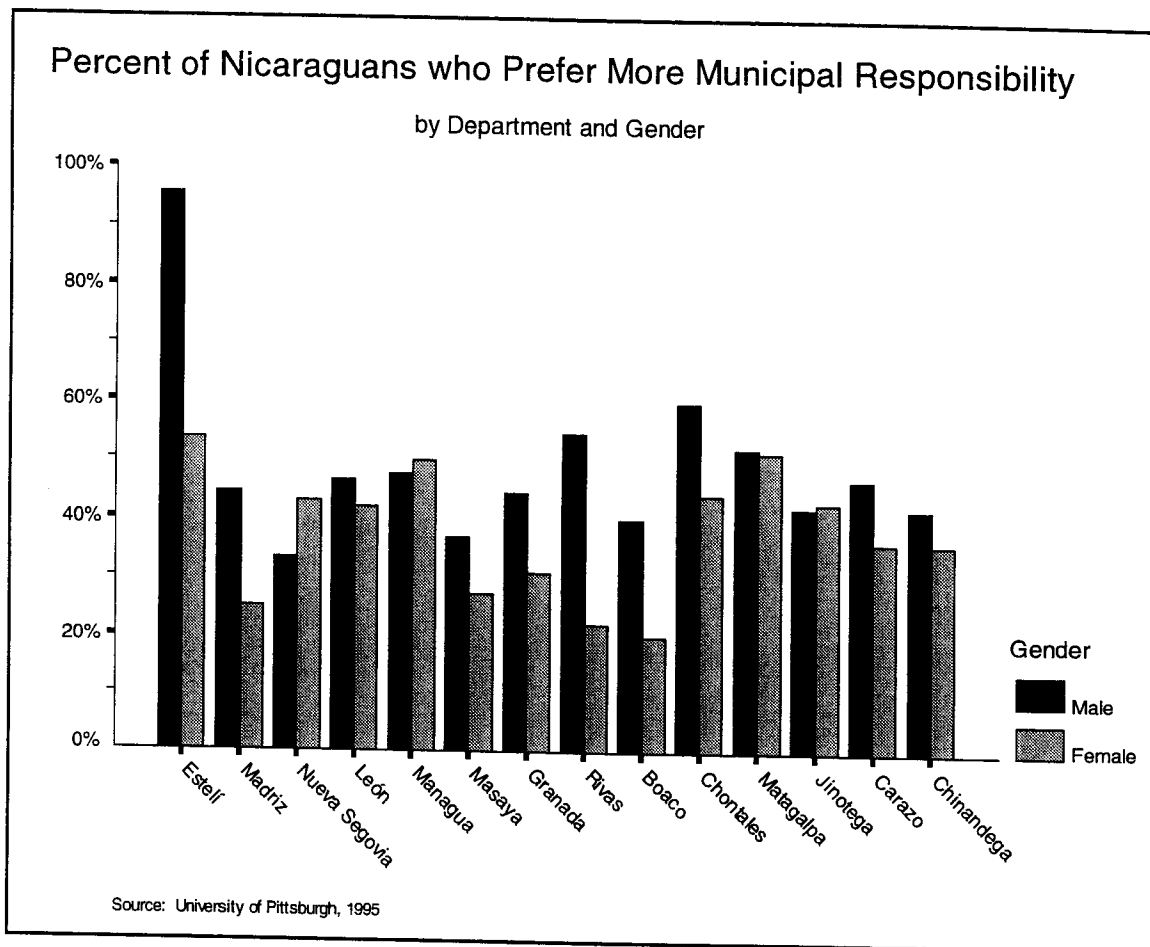
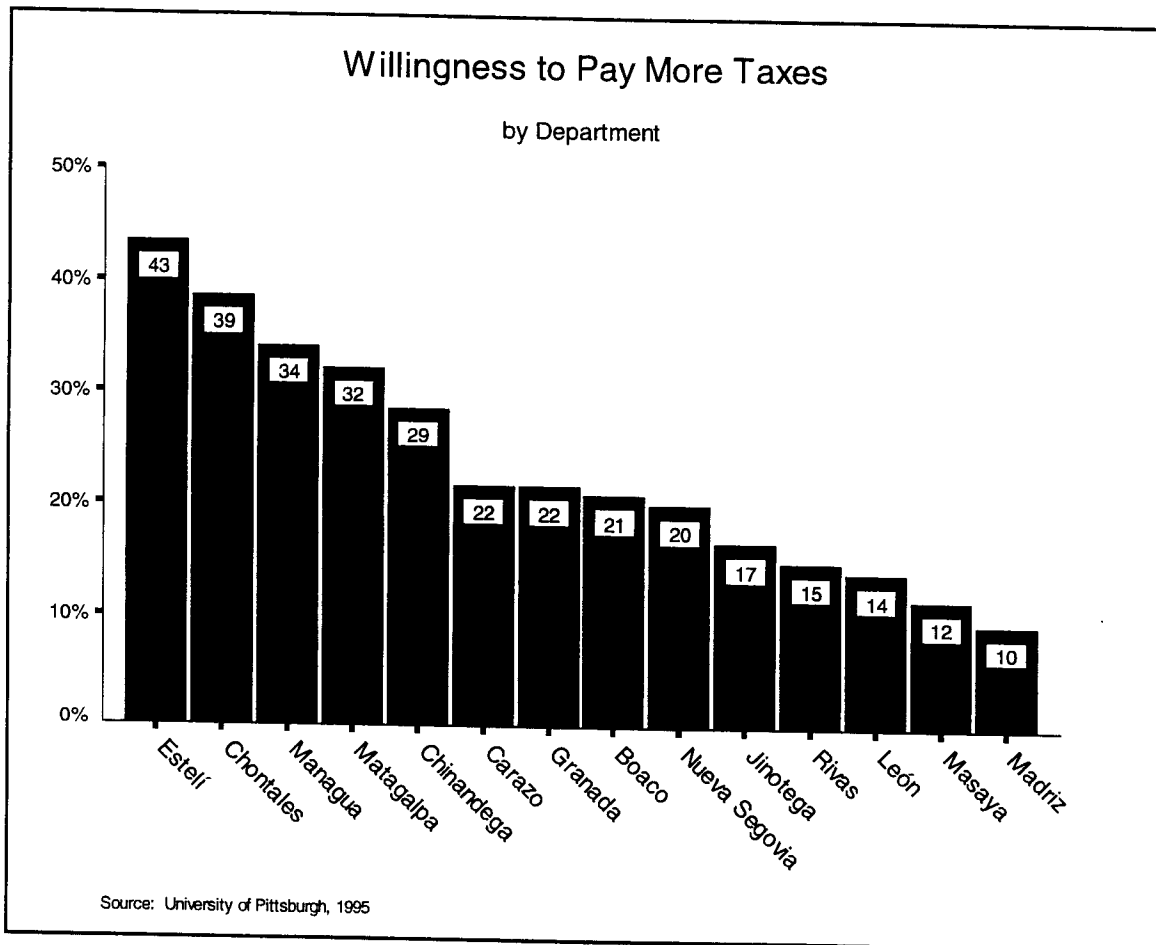


Figure 4.20

Few of us are willing to pay more taxes, but if we are offered better services, some would do so. In El Salvador, an overwhelming 79.1 per cent would not, while in Nicaragua, 73.7% would not. But in certain departments, a surprisingly strong willingness to pay taxes was found. As is shown in figure 4.21, in Estelí, Chontales and Managua, over one-third of the population was willing to bear a heavier tax burden.

**Figure 4.21**

Perceived Responsiveness of Municipal Government

Finally, the survey asked those interviewed how responsive they felt their local government was to them. The results are shown in figure 4.22. As can be seen, only a very small percentage of Nicaraguans believe that the local government is very responsive. The most common reply was "once in a while," but over one half of Nicaraguans felt that local government almost never or never responds to the wishes of the people.

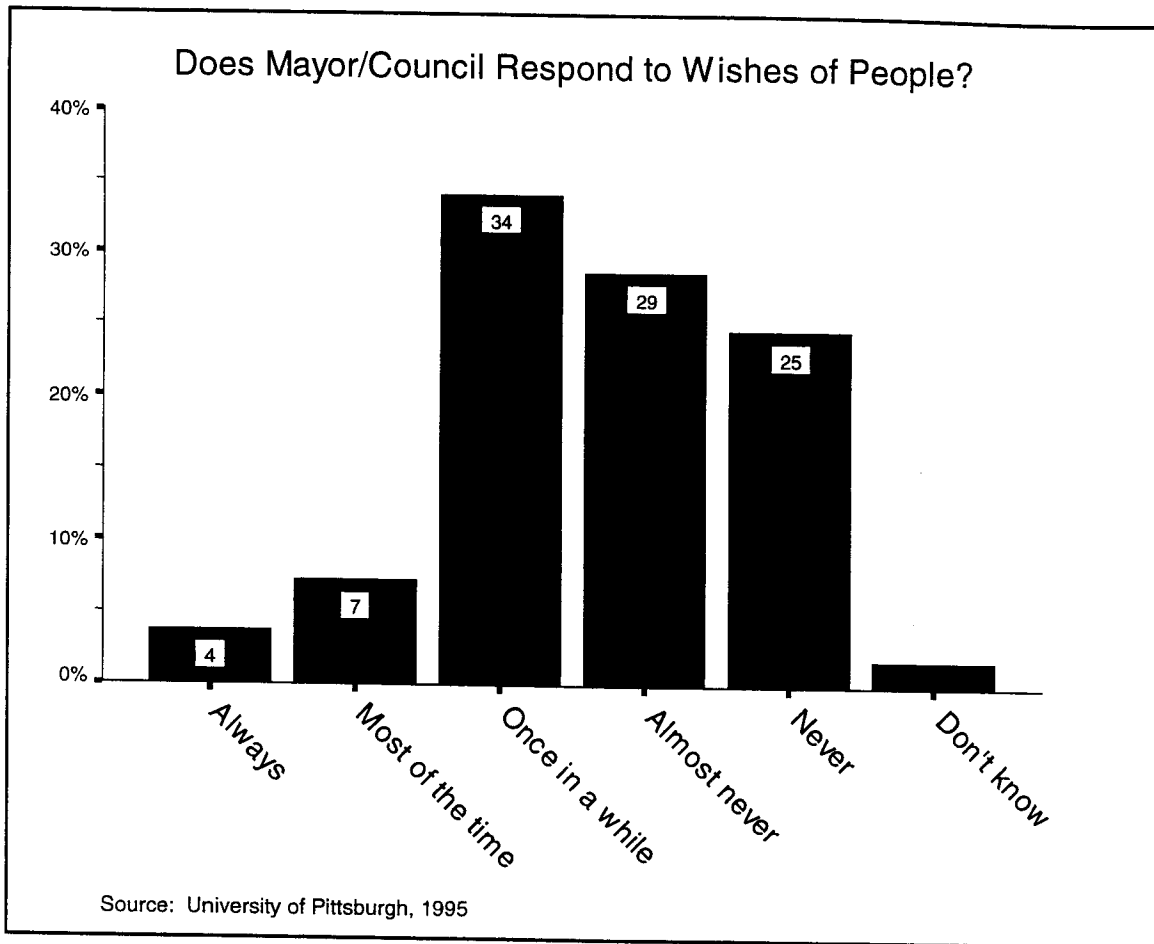


Figure 4.22

Conclusions

The results of this empirical exploration of local government in Nicaragua provide strong confirmation of the second hypothesis. Neither attendance at meetings nor demand-making is related to the democratic norms indicators. In contrast, evaluation of municipal government services and evaluation of treatment of citizens by local officials are directly linked to system support and interpersonal trust. In addition, we find that perceived responsiveness of local government is linked to those same democratic values. Hence, it is not the quantity of participation that matters, even though many foreign assistance projects measure their success by counting instances of participation, but it is the quality of that participation that is central. Unless citizens feel that they are well treated by their

local governments, it appears that in Nicaragua, as has already been found in El Salvador, no amount of participation will increase their system support. There is also little relationship of any of the variables to tolerance, indicating that while satisfying local participation may build national system support, vital for political stability, one cannot expect local government to make citizens more tolerant.

Appendix

The Data: A Complex Compilation

In this study, five different data sets are used, and the reader may become easily confused as to which data set(s) is/are being utilized in a given section of the report. Three of the five data sets are part of the University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project, while two are from CID Gallup, Costa Rica. What follows is a description of the five data sets and their utility in this project.

Data Set # 1: The Six-Nation Study of 1991

In order to measure changes in Nicaraguan public opinion on the subject of democracy, one must have a baseline of data from which to draw comparisons. We are fortunate that such a baseline exists as part of the University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project. In 1991, that study collected attitudinal survey data on the opinions of over 4,000 Central Americans in the metropolitan areas of each of the six Spanish speaking republics of the region.¹ Identical questions were used in each survey, and sample designs were similar in each case. As a result, comparison among the six countries is greatly facilitated. Nicaragua was one of the six countries included, with the research team in that country being supervised by Andrew J. Stein, currently Assistant Professor at Tennessee Technological University.²

Country samples for the Six-Nation Study were of area probability design. In each country, the most recent population census data were used. Within each stratum, census

¹The funding sources included the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Tinker Foundation, Inc., the Howard Heinz Endowment, the North-South Center, the University of Pittsburgh Central Research Small Grant Fund and the Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (IDELA). The collaborating institutions in Central America were: Guatemala-- Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES); El Salvador--Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (IDELA); Honduras--Centro de Estudio y Promoción del Desarrollo (CEPROD) and Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH); Nicaragua--Centro de Estudios Internacionales (CEI), and Escuela de Sociología, Universidad Centroamericana (UCA); Costa Rica--Universidad de Costa Rica; Panama--Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos "Justo Arosemena" (CELA). Collaborating doctoral students in Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh were Ricardo Córdova (El Salvador), Annabelle Conroy (Honduras), Orlando Pérez (Panama), and Andrew Stein (Nicaragua). Collaborating faculty were John Booth, University of North Texas (Nicaragua and Guatemala), and Jon Hurwitz, University of Pittsburgh (Costa Rica).

²Interested readers can consult the doctoral dissertation that emerged from that research. See Andrew J. Stein, *The Prophetic Mission, The Catholic Church and Politics: Nicaragua in the Context of Central America*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1995. While the dissertation focuses on the subject of religion and attitudes of the clergy, it makes frequent comparative use of the 1991 mass survey.

maps were used to select, at random, an appropriate number of political subdivisions (e.g., districts) and, within each subdivision, the census maps were used to select an appropriate number of segments from which to draw the interviews. In Central America, census bureaus divide the census maps into small areas designed to be covered by a single census taker. The maps are sufficiently detailed to show all of the dwelling units. In places like Panama City, where there are a large number of apartment buildings, lists are available that show the number of dwelling units within each building. In the larger buildings, this sometimes results in more than one census segment per building.

Costa Rica was established as the country for the pilot test of the survey items. That sample was gathered in the fall of 1990. The surveys in the other five countries were then carried out during the summer of 1991 and the winter of 1991-92. The design called for samples in the range of at least 500 to a maximum of 1,000 respondents from each country. The lower boundary of 500 respondents was established so as to provide a sufficient number of cases from each country to allow for reliable statistical analysis at the level of the country.³ The sample sizes for each country are as follows: Guatemala, N = 904; El Salvador, N = 910; Honduras, N = 566; Nicaragua, N = 704; Costa Rica, N = 597; Panama, N = 500.

The Nicaraguan sample of 1991 was heavily focused on Managua, but interviews were also carried out in León, Masaya and Granada. A small number of those interviews were also conducted in rural areas. In this study, we retain the urban interviews, but drop the rural in order to retain comparability with the urban samples from the other five countries.

Data Set # 2: The Central America Local Government Study

There is a growing interest in Central America on the role of local government. Part of this interest is a reflection of the need to decentralize inefficient central governments. Part is a reflection of the fiscal realities brought on by structural readjustment being undertaken throughout the world. And part of the interest is directed toward the question of the role of local government in promoting democracy. It was to this final objective that, in 1994, the USAID Regional Office for Housing and Urban Development (RHUDO), via its cooperative agreement with ICMA (International City/County Management Association) of Washington, D. C., asked me to undertake a study of the opinions of Central Americans toward their local governments. An extensive report on the results of the study was

³By "reliable" what is meant is that the sample had to be large enough so that the confidence intervals were small enough to be able to speak with some precision about the results. A probability sample of 500 produces a sampling error of +/- 4.5% on a 50-50 split at the 95% confidence level. Hence, on a 50-50 binomial split for Panama, the smallest sample in this study, the true result could be anywhere between 54.5% and 45.5%. Clustering within each sample (required by the area probability design) tends to decrease the accuracy of the sample (because of intra-class correlation), whereas stratification would tend to increase the efficiency.

presented to USAID in 1994.⁴ In consultation with the RHUDO staff in Guatemala, a series of ten questionnaire items was drafted and the content agreed upon.⁵ CID Gallup, Costa Rica, was contracted to include the items as part of their ongoing omnibus studies of public opinion in Central America. The dates of each survey and sample size are reported in the following table:

Table Appendix.1. 1994 Local Government Survey and Sample Size

Country	Date	Sample size
Guatemala	June, 1994	1,212
El Salvador	May, 1994	1,212
Honduras	June, 1994	1,220
Nicaragua	April, 1994	1,202
Costa Rica	April, 1994	1,204
Panama	March, 1994	1,218
Total		7,268

In total, 7,268 Central Americans were interviewed for this study. In each country, the samples are national probability in design, with the respondents from the primary

⁴See "Central Americans View their Local Governments: A Six-Nation Study, 1994." Presented to the Regional Office for Central American Programs (ROCAP), Guatemala, October 5, 1994.

⁵Pre-tests of the items were conducted in each of the Central American countries. The pre-tests consisted of administration of the questions to respondents in both urban and rural areas. The pre-tests were conducted by experts in each country: Guatemala, Lic. Jorge Castillo Velarde of ASIES; El Salvador, Ricardo Córdova, Executive Director of FundaUngo; Honduras, Rafael Díaz Donaire of World Neighbors; Nicaragua, Andrew Stein, Universidad Centroamericana; Costa Rica, Lic. Miguel Gómez B., Professor of the University of Costa Rica; and Panama, Orlando Pérez, Ph.D. candidate, University of Pittsburgh and Research Associate of CELA (Centro de Estudios Latinamericanos "Justo Arosemena"). In early March, the consultants from El Salvador, Panama and Nicaragua came to the U.S. (to attend a professional meeting) during which time they reviewed the pre-tests from each of the countries. The pre-tests revealed a number of areas in which the questions needed improvement. Based upon the input from the six pre-test consultants, a final version of the questionnaire was drafted and transmitted to RHUDO. Although the items are identical in content for each country, minor differences in questionnaire wording were needed to best reflect the terminology used in each of the six countries of the region. The final versions are included in the section of this study focusing on local government.

sampling unit being selected based upon the "last birthday system"⁶ plus a quota system (age and sex). The samples for each country were weighted based on population size, and the final weighted combined sample produced a file of 7,254 cases. It is that combined file that is analyzed in this report. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face with trained Gallup interviewers except in Costa Rica, where 500 interviews were conducted over the telephone. The ubiquitous availability of telephones in Costa Rica made the use of phone interviews possible. The remaining interviews were directed to those without phones. Interviewers were individuals with high school education or greater. Approximately one-quarter of all of the interviews were revalidated by telephone or personal follow up by field supervisors. In each country the survey focused on the voting age population, generally those 18 years of age and older.

Data Set # 3: The 1994 CID Gallup National Survey of Nicaragua

According to the "USAID/Nicaragua Action Plan, FY95-FY96," of March, 1994, a key strategic objective of the Mission is building democracy. The two major program outputs are: 1) wider promulgation and understanding of democratic values, and 2) greater confidence in democratic institutions and processes. These objectives are to be achieved through a variety of programs, including municipal decentralization, civic education, electoral support, etc.

The great bulk of the indicators established by USAID/N to measure achievement of the two strategic objectives are based on public opinion survey data. Specifically, the Mission has determined that it will utilize a 1994 survey of the mass public and certain special groups, along with baseline data from the University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project (see pp. 25-26 of FY95-96 Action Plan).

CID Gallup of Costa Rica was contracted by USAID/Nicaragua to conduct a study of public opinion focused on democratic knowledge, attitudes and practice. The study was directed by USAID's Office of Democratic Initiatives. The sample involved interviews with 2,420 Nicaraguans. The documentation provided by Gallup does not provide many details regarding the sample design itself, but discussions within and outside the USAID Mission have established its basic outlines. The sample frame used was that provided by PROFAMILIA of Managua, Nicaragua, a family planning NGO funded in part by grants from USAID. That sample was designed to represent the national population of Nicaragua, both urban and rural. The PROFAMILIA staff provided to Gallup copies of the census bureau maps that they had obtained. These maps had been updated for the 1995 national

⁶The interviewer determines the dates of the birthdays of all household members and interviews the member whose birthday is closest to the date of the interview.

population census.⁷ CID Gallup presented to USAID numerous reports on the results of the 1994 survey, copies of which can be consulted in the USAID offices in Managua.

Data Set # 4: The CID Gallup 1994 Special Samples

An additional component of the CID Gallup work in Costa Rica was to conduct interviews of a number of special groups of particular interest to USAID. For example, one such special group was school teachers. A national probability sample normally would include some school teachers by random chance, but since teachers comprise a very small percentage of the population of any country, a national sample would normally only have a handful of teachers in it. In order to have a sufficient number of teachers, or members of the other special interest groups for USAID, these special samples were drawn. In Table Appendix.2 below, a list of the groups and their sample size is presented. The special sample size should not be taken as any indication of the relative size of each group in the population. Rather, it was a function of design considerations negotiated between USAID and CID Gallup. Furthermore, the samples are not probability samples (i.e., random samples) for the groups that they represent since it was difficult in most cases for Gallup to obtain a full list of all of the people in the special group. For some of the special groups, e.g., the public employees, union members or political leaders, no such list exists. In each case Gallup attempted to locate people who fit the group definition by going to their logical place of work (e.g., schools for school teachers) and arranging interviews from there. Since the sample is not of probability in design, it could be that these special group data files do not accurately represent the views of the group as a whole, but it is impossible to determine the nature of the biases, if any, that may have affected these samples. Generally speaking, there is good reason to feel confident that the samples provide a fair reflection of the groups they are designed to represent.

⁷For a report on the Gallup study, see Mitchell A. Seligson, "Evaluation of the Utility of the of the CID/Gallup Study of Democratic Values in Nicaragua." Report prepared for USAID/Nicaragua and MSI, Incorporated, Washington, D. C.

Table Appendix.2
Sample Size for Special Groups and National Sample^a, 1994

Mass public	2,427	59.1%
Public employees	308	7.5%
Judges	302	7.4%
Police/soldiers	300	7.3%
Teachers	300	7.3%
Union members	208	5.1%
Leaders	150	3.7%
Journalists	110	2.7%
Table Total	4,105	100.1% ^b

^aThe actual sample was 2,420, but as a result of weighting and rounding, described below, the weighted sample total = 2427.

^bTable does not total 100.0% owing to rounding error.

A more daunting problem with the special samples is that not all of the questions utilized in the mass sample were asked of all special samples. It is not clear why this was done, and it would appear that in some cases items that were dropped were deleted in error. In any event, the presentation in this report of the results of the various samples will, at times, produce no data for a given group or set of groups because of the exclusion of the questionnaire item utilized in the mass sample from the special groups samples.

Data Set # 5: University of Pittsburgh National Sample, 1995

In the first quarter of 1995 the University of Pittsburgh replicated its 1991 survey in Nicaragua. This was a collaborative effort of Pittsburgh, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the Instituto de Estudios Nicaragüenses (IEN). For this study funding was sufficient (with support from the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation) to fund a national sample. The study was conducted in concert with Ricardo Córdova Macias, Executive Director of the Fundación Guillermo Ungo of El Salvador. Córdova, in collaboration with Seligson, had carried out the 1991 and 1995 surveys of El Salvador. In 1995, with support from USAID El Salvador, the 1991 survey of democratic values of that country was replicated. The Ebert Foundation wished to compare the results of the El Salvador survey with those of Nicaragua, and for that reason supported the 1995 study.

The field work was conducted by the Instituto de Estudios Nicaragüenses, under the general coordination of Rodolfo Delgado Romero, Executive Director. In that survey 1,200 Nicaraguans were interviewed in all departments of the country except Zelaya and Río San Juan.

The 1995 survey used items identical to those employed in the 1991 Central America survey of the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, it included some new items asked for the first time. The focus of this report, however, is on the items that are identical in the 1991 and 1995 surveys.

The 1995 survey is the data source most appropriately used to make over-time comparisons. The 1994 Gallup survey has a number of similar items, but in virtually every case the wording or response choice format or both have been altered. As a result, it is not possible to directly compare the 1991 University of Pittsburgh survey and the 1994 Gallup study. The Gallup study does, however, offer a number of similar items which tap many of the same concepts explored in the University of Pittsburgh surveys. Since the Gallup survey allows, as noted above, a focus on a number of groups of special interest, that survey will largely be used in this study to contrast those special groups with the national sample, whereas the 1995 University of Pittsburgh study will be used to make longitudinal comparisons.

Considerations on Reweighting the 1994 and 1995 Samples

It is common in survey research to interview a sample that in some ways is disproportionate to the actual population. Normally that is done for cost consideration reasons. For example, it might be very costly to conduct rural interviews, so a sample could be designed to gather a larger number of urban interviews than exist in the population. In order to correct for this distortion, the researcher applies post-hoc weights to the urban interviews, reducing their impact on the survey results while increasing the weight of the rural interviews. The result is to reestablish the relative proportion of urban/rural interviews reported in the analysis of the data.

The 1991 University of Pittsburgh sample was self-weighting in design, such that no post-hoc weights had to be applied. The 1994 Central America survey conducted by Gallup did require such weights, and they were applied to the data based upon the best estimates of the populations of the nations' capital cities, other major cities and rural areas. The 1994 Gallup survey of special groups was not designed to be a representative sample of the groups from which they were drawn, and thus no weights needed to be applied there.

The weighting situation with respect to the 1994 Gallup survey and the 1995 University of Pittsburgh (IEN) survey is far more complex. Since these surveys are used heavily in the analysis that follows, it became particularly important to pay close attention to the weighting schemes to be applied. The discussion that follows explains the logic utilized in that effort.

Survey samples have many different design considerations, but all strive to accurately represent the populations to which they seek to generalize. In order to do so,

it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of that population, information that universally is derived from census data. For example, to construct a sample for a country about which one wishes to draw inferences, one crucial piece of information is the size of the population and its geographic division. Typically, this means knowing the proportion of the total national population residing in the major cities, the distribution of the population by major political units, the rural/urban distribution, and the gender composition. Once such data are available, the sample can be structured to represent those basic divisions of the population and the data analysis will enable the researcher to make statements about the country as a whole as well as major subdivisions within it. Sometimes because it is very costly to obtain interviews in certain regions (because of their remote location or the high risk conditions present in them), sample designs will deliberately underrepresent those areas and later reweigh the cases in order to adjust the sample to match the known population distribution.

The problem that all sample designs confront in Nicaragua is the absence of reasonably accurate population census data. The most recent census published dates from 1971, but before the results were fully tabulated a major earthquake hit Managua and destroyed a significant part of the census questionnaires. As a result, data from that census are not considered to be highly reliable, and many surveyors rely instead on the 1963 census. Complicating the problem of the census data is the impact of catastrophic events that have had a major but not fully measured impact on the population, its size and location. The earthquake itself is one such factor, killing some 10,000 people but also causing the dislocation of unknown numbers of Managua residents, some of whom permanently moved to other locations. Then came the insurrection against Somoza and the Contra War, which collectively are said to have cost thousands of lives. It is known that the insurrection and war had an even greater impact on migration, both domestic and international. Some Nicaraguans fled regions of conflict to seek safe havens in regions that seemed less affected by the fighting. Others fled the country to migrate to Costa Rica, the United States or elsewhere. Some of these individuals have returned, others have not. Unfortunately, we do not know with any precision the full impact of these events.

All survey samples conducted in Nicaragua have had to come to grips with the paucity of reliable census data. Numerous and creative mechanisms have been utilized to cope with the problem, but no survey has been totally successful in overcoming it. In 1995, however, a new national census was taken and provisional results are now available. The challenge then becomes how to best utilize that new information to introduce an *ex post* weighting of the survey samples analyzed in this report.

The census data available as of this writing in the fall of 1995 are the preliminary tabulations for the nation as a whole, with the exception of incomplete tabulations for the RANN and RAAS regions as well as from two municipalities (Paiwas y Waslala) in which the census was still in the process of being conducted. The census bureau has not yet provided urban/rural or gender breakdowns. Since both the Gallup and IEN surveys based

their designs on urban/rural breakdowns as estimated by the World Bank and other organizations, the absence of this information at this time is unfortunate. Nonetheless, the information available is a far more solid basis upon which to weight the samples being analyzed here than any other available source. Indeed, I argue that it makes sense to ignore the original weights applied by the survey organizations that drew the samples and to reweigh the samples based upon the 1995 preliminary population census data.

Consider the case of the Gallup survey, which based its sample upon the work done by PROFAMILIA. PROFAMILIA had access to the updated census maps, which allowed them to provide very precise locations of dwelling units in all areas of the country. But their population estimates were drawn not from the census but from a 1989 survey, which in turn was drawn from a 1985 survey which itself was based on an extrapolation from the 1971 census. One suspects a compounding of errors in each of these estimates based upon estimates.

The specific weighting scheme that makes the most sense and takes maximum advantage of the data currently available is to weight the samples by the proportion of the population living in each of the departments of Nicaragua. Only in this way can we know, for example, that the samples will neither over nor under represent the population of Managua.

Use of the department as the unit of analysis for the weighting produces a very positive effect in terms of the utility of the data. The surveys in question are focused on political variables, and in Nicaragua, departments have great political significance. Historically, Nicaraguans have had great loyalty to their departments of birth, considering themselves to be proud natives of León or Masaya, for example. The more direct political relevance is that elections are, to a greater or lesser extent, based upon department constituencies. Under the Sandinistas (the 1984 and 1990 elections) the departments were regrouped into regions, but even then national elections for the legislature were based upon regional lists of candidates, which in turn were comprised of departments. Under the 1995 reforms for the upcoming 1996 elections (article 145 of the Constitution), Nicaragua will again revert to the department as the basis electoral unit for elections to the legislature, but in addition, 20 out of the 90 deputies will be elected from a national list. So, for 78% of the deputies to be elected in the 1996 election, the department is the fundamental electoral unit from which they must receive sufficient votes to get elected.⁸ For all of these reasons, the department is the ideal unit upon which to base the sample weights.

There is, however, a downside to reweighting the samples with the 1995 data. The samples were not originally designed to represent departments, but the weighting I am applying is designed to do precisely that. The original samples were designed to represent

⁸I would like to thank Victor H. Rojas of USAID for this information.

the nation as a whole, Managua, and the rural/urban divisions, nothing more. Nonetheless, the two samples in question did in fact cover all of the departments of the country (with the exception of RAAS and RAAN [i.e., Zelaya]) and in the case of the 1995 IEN sample, with the additional exception of Río San Juan). In addition, both samples included both urban and rural sectors in each of the departments. Nonetheless, one cannot say that the rural/urban proportions are an accurate representation of the true population distribution. As a practical matter, since the urban/rural distinction is a subjective one for the Nicaraguan census bureau, it is not entirely clear that there is any objective rural/urban distinction that should have been a goal of the sample design in the first place. For example, many very rural areas of Nicaragua contain within them a small county seat with perhaps 20 to 30 houses grouped around a town square. Perhaps all of the occupants of such a location have rural sector jobs, but the census bureau would classify this as an urban area. In short, while the reweighting has many pluses, one cannot say with certainty that the confidence interval of departmental units is known and of an acceptable magnitude.

One clearly negative effect that the weighting methodology utilized here produces is that in the IEN survey, and to a lesser extent in the Gallup survey, some of the departments with small population sizes had relatively few cases in the samples. As a result, one must exercise considerable caution when generalizing to those populations. In the detailed analysis of the sample weighting schemes presented below, the reader should take note of those departments in which the original sample significantly underrepresents the population.

Table Appendix.3. Weighting Scheme for IEN and CID Gallup Samples

1. Department	2. 1995 Population	3. % of total	IEN 1995 Survey				Gallup 1994 Survey			
			4. IEN Survey N	5. Fract. pop. of incl. areas	6. Desired N: (#5 * 1,200)	7. Weight factor (#6/#4)	8. Gallup Survey N	9. Fract. pop. of incl. areas	10. Desired N: (#9 * 2,420)	11. Weight factor (#10/#8)
Managua	1,056,702	26.68%	494	0.29	347	0.70	869	0.28	686	0.79
Matagalpa	364,790	9.21%	60	0.10	120	1.99	182	0.10	237	1.30
Chinandega	348,971	8.81%	123	0.10	114	0.93	210	0.09	226	1.08
León	330,168	8.34%	123	0.09	108	0.88	168	0.09	214	1.28
Masaya	236,107	5.96%	60	0.06	77	1.29	158	0.06	153	0.97
Zelaya ^a	230,970	5.83%	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Jinotega	214,070	5.40%	40	0.06	70	1.76	82	0.06	139	1.69
Estelí	168,936	4.27%	50	0.05	55	1.11	95	0.05	110	1.15
Granada	153,183	3.87%	40	0.04	50	1.26	102	0.04	99	0.97
Nueva Segovia	144,470	3.65%	10	0.04	47	4.74	78	0.04	94	1.20
Carazo	141,831	3.58%	65	0.04	47	0.72	117	0.04	92	0.79
Rivas	141,792	3.58%	20	0.04	47	2.33	69	0.04	92	1.33
Chontales	136,347	3.44%	44	0.04	45	1.02	78	0.04	88	1.13
Boaco	124,513	3.14%	50	0.03	41	0.82	99	0.03	81	0.82
Madriz	96,970	2.45%	21	0.03	32	1.51	59	0.03	63	1.07
Río San Juan	70,875	1.79%	0	0.00	0	0.00	54	0.02	46	0.85
Total	3,960,695	100.00%	1,200	1.00	1,206		2,420		2,420	
Total for sample				3,658,840				3,729,715		

^aThe preliminary tabulations for the 1995 census utilize RANN and RAAS instead of the older departmental name "Zelaya." Since the Gallup survey coded the cases in this area into the Zelaya department they could not be disaggregated into RANN and RAAS. Neither IEN nor Gallup included Zelaya in their sample frames.