

The Politics of the Rural and Urban Poor



A rural migrant worker walks by a giant video screen in his new home of Beijing, China. Several hundred million poor rural villagers have sought a better life in China's cities, presenting an extreme case of the rural-to-urban migration that continues in most LDCs.

Source: John Sun/Corbis.

Throughout the developing world, the rural and urban poor are the largest segment of the population. At the same time, however, they are usually the least influential politically because they lack the power resources—wealth, education, professional skills, organizational ability—available to the middle and upper classes. To be sure, in times of revolutionary upheaval or even moderate political and economic reform, they may wield considerable influence, but even then they generally need outside leadership and organization. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the rural poor and then examine their urban counterparts, many of whom began life in the countryside.

THE RURAL POOR: THIRD WORLD PEASANTRY

When we speak of “the people” of Africa and Asia, in large part we are talking about the peasantry, that is, poor farmers living in a traditional culture. Despite substantial urbanization in recent decades, rural residents still constitute over half of the Third World’s population.¹ It is in the countryside where some of the worst aspects of political and economic underdevelopment prevail. In nations as distinct as China and Mexico, rural annual incomes are only 20–30 percent as high as average urban earnings. Wide urban–rural gaps also persist in literacy, health care, and life expectancy. Rural villagers are less likely than their urban counterparts to have clean drinking water, electricity, or schools.

While the proportion of the Third World’s population living in the countryside is substantially higher than in highly industrialized nations, that percentage varies greatly from country to country: from over 75 percent in Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Nepal to less than 10 percent in Chile and Venezuela. Almost everywhere, the rural rate of poverty far exceeds the urban rate. Whereas the rural population constitutes some 55 percent of the LDCs’ population, it accounts for about 75 percent of the estimated 1.4 billion people living in absolute poverty—defined as living on \$1.25 a day (PPP).² These people suffer from inadequate housing, widespread illiteracy, malnutrition, and high rates of infant mortality. On average the rate of rural poverty is about 50 percent, but in the world’s poorest nations (such as Zimbabwe, Congo, and Afghanistan) that figure rises to 70–80 percent.

In most of the developing world, political and economic power are both concentrated in the cities. Consequently, government policies—on issues ranging from social expenditures to agricultural pricing—have a predictable urban bias. As noted in Chapter 1, modernization theory argues that as countries develop, modern values and institutions will spread from the cities to the countryside, and the gap between the two will narrow. Conversely, dependency theorists maintain that the links between urban and rural areas replicate the exploitative international relationship between the industrialized core (the First World) and the periphery (the LDCs). What is certain is that resolving the political and economic tensions *between* urban and rural areas, reducing the vast inequalities *within* the countryside, and dealing with urban-to-rural migration remain among the most difficult and important challenges facing developing nations today.

RURAL CLASS STRUCTURES

Within the countryside, there are generally substantial disparities in landownership. Often, agricultural property is concentrated in a relatively small number of hands. These inequalities have contributed to rural poverty and produced rigid class systems in countries such as El Salvador, Colombia, the Philippines, and parts of India. Many African nations—with notable exceptions such as South Africa, Morocco, and Kenya—have a somewhat more equitable pattern of land distribution, though they still suffer from intense rural poverty and sharp urban–rural gaps. East Asia (excepting the Philippines and parts of India) has the most equitable distribution of farmland in the Third World.

At the apex of the rural class system stand the large and powerful landowners, sometimes known as the *oligarchy*. Major Filipino sugar growers and Argentine cattle barons, for example, have historically exercised considerable political power in national politics. In El Salvador, the most influential coffee producers dominated the country's political system for much of the twentieth century. Land concentration has been most intense in Latin America, with its tradition of large estates (*latifundia*) dating back to the Spanish colonial era and the early years of independence. In the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, along with parts of India, Indonesia, and Thailand, reactionary landed elites have also contributed to rural backwardness and poverty.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the economic and political powers of rural landlords have declined considerably in numerous LDCs. In the most dramatic cases, radical revolutions in countries such as China and Vietnam stripped landlords of their property. Revolutionary governments sometimes killed many big landowners and sent others to prison camps for “political reeducation.” Elsewhere, nonrevolutionary and relatively peaceful agrarian reforms undermined the rural elites of Peru and South Korea.* In industrializing nations

*The terms *agrarian reform* and *land reform* are often used interchangeably. However, as discussed below, *land reform* refers only to the redistribution of land to needy peasants or farm laborers. *Agrarian reform* is a broader process encompassing financial and technical aid, which must support land redistribution if it is to be effective.

such as Brazil and Thailand, the economic importance of agribusiness at the national level has diminished relative to the industrial and commercial sectors. Therefore, numerous wealthy, landowning families have diversified into those economic sectors or have left agriculture entirely.

At the local and regional levels, however, landlords in Latin America and much of Asia continue to exercise considerable power. For example, upper-caste farmers in the Indian state of Bihar and large cattle ranchers in the Brazilian interior retain virtually unchallenged supremacy. At times, they have intimidated, or even murdered, peasant organizers and union leaders without fear of the legal consequences. Such was the fate of Chico Mendes, the celebrated Brazilian union leader who had organized Amazonian rubber-tree tappers against the powerful ranchers who were clearing the forest and destroying the local habitat. Despite Mendes's impressive international stature (the Turner broadcasting network and various U.S. senators had honored him, for example) and despite his links to influential American environmental groups, local landlords hired gunmen to assassinate him. Only after a sustained international outcry were his murderers brought to trial. They were convicted, but after serving several years were able to walk out of prison and stay at large for 3 years. Hundreds of lesser-known Brazilians have been killed on orders from powerful landlords—crimes that often go unpunished.

On the rung beneath the landed elite, we find midsize landlords and more affluent peasants. The latter group (sometimes called *kulaks*) consists of peasants who, unlike small landlords, still work on the land themselves. However, unlike poorer peasants, *kulaks* can afford to hire additional peasant labor to work with them. While neither midsize landlords nor richer peasants belong to the national power elite, they usually exercise considerable political influence locally in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Brazil. Indeed, in much of Asia, where the biggest agricultural holdings are not nearly as large as those in Latin America, these two groups are a potent political force. Extended family networks typically magnify their influence.

Finally, at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, the rural poor—including peasants who own small plots of land, tenant farmers, and farmworkers—are generally the Third World's most impoverished and powerless occupational group. *Peasants* are defined as family farmers who work small plots and maintain a traditional lifestyle that is distinct from city dwellers. Because they are typically poor and poorly educated, peasants often lack the means to transport their crops to market themselves, lack ready access to credit, and lack the knowledge or resources to deal with the legal or bureaucratic proceedings that they periodically encounter. As a result, they depend on the services of merchants, moneylenders, lawyers, and government bureaucrats, many of whom exploit them. Their links to the world—including the government, the military, the church, and the market economy—are largely dependent upon individuals and institutions outside the peasants' community.³ Thus, as Eric Wolf has noted, “Peasant denotes an asymmetrical structural relationship between the producers of surplus [peasants] and controllers [including landlords, merchants, and tax collectors].”⁴

We may further subdivide poor peasants into two subgroups: those who own small amounts of land for family cultivation (smallholders) and those who are landless. The ranks of the landless, in turn, include tenant farmers (who enter into various types of rental arrangements with landlords) and wage laborers. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Smallholders, for example, may also supplement their incomes by working as farm laborers or renting additional land as tenants. Usually, it is the landless that constitute the poorest of the rural poor. While they represent a mere 10 percent of all agricultural families in countries such as Kenya and Sierra Leone, their numbers rise to 50–70 percent in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Brazil.⁵ Not surprisingly, in Latin America and parts of Africa and Asia, where concentrated landownership and associated peasant landlessness have been particularly notable, the issue of land reform has often been at the center of rural politics.

PEASANT POLITICS

Despite their vast numbers, peasants often play a muted role in Third World politics. Because most LDCs did not have competitive national elections until recently and because, even where there have been elections, powerful groups have often controlled the peasant vote, the rural poor have not readily convert their numbers into political influence. The peasantry's political leverage is also limited by poverty, lack of education, dependence on outsiders, and physical isolation from the centers of national power and from peasants elsewhere in the country. Cultural values stressing caution and conservatism may further constrain peasant political behavior. Karl Marx's analysis of nineteenth-century European rural society questioned the peasants' capacity for political change or revolution. Writing on the French peasantry, he derided their alleged lack of solidarity and class consciousness, and disparagingly referred to them as a "sack of potatoes." Dismayed by their apparent conservatism, he dismissed peasants as "the class that represents the barbarism in civilization."⁶ In the twentieth century, Robert Redfield's classic study of Third World peasants portrayed them somewhat similarly. "In every part of the world," he argued, "generally speaking, peasants have been a conservative factor in social change, a brake on revolution."⁷

Indeed, over the years, anthropological writings frequently have depicted peasant political culture as fatalistic and isolated. Hence, it was claimed, most of them doubt that collective political action can better their own fate. Discussing the reaction of Indian villagers to local government authorities, Phyllis Arora describes a sense of powerlessness resulting in political apathy. "Helplessness is . . . evoked by the presence of the district officer. The peasant tends to feel that all he [or she] can do before such authority . . . is petition for redress of grievances. . . . In the ultimate analysis, however . . . the peasant feels at the mercy of the whims of the [political] authorities."⁸ Western journalists, visiting peasant communities in China after the massive urban protests demonstrations of 1989, noted how insulated the villagers were from those events and from the national political debate.

No doubt, peasants typically are wary of radical change and respectful of community traditions. To some extent, this conservatism reflects a suspicion of outside values—distrust frequently grounded in religious beliefs and other long-standing traditions. Indeed, the maintenance of a distinct peasant culture depends, to some extent, on the rejection of external influences. But peasant suspicion of social change is frequently understandable and rational. Struggling on the margins of economic survival, the rural poor have found that the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, as well as other aspects of rural modernization, have often impacted their lives negatively. In rural Pakistan, for example, the introduction of tractors improved the output and income of the farmers who could afford them. As a consequence, however, a lot of poorer tenant farmers who could no longer compete were forced off their plots, thereby concentrating land into fewer hands.⁹ Political changes may also be threatening. For example, when outside activists have organized the rural poor to challenge local injustices, those peasants have often been ruthlessly repressed. Small wonder, then, that they are frequently suspicious of change, including any challenge to the power structure.

This does not mean, however, that they are incapable of standing up to landlords and government authorities who wrong them. Far from it! Examples of peasant resistance are commonplace, ranging from the most restrained to the most radical. James C. Scott has demonstrated that peasants in Southeast Asia who appear to accept the established order actually often engage in unobtrusive "everyday forms of resistance," such as theft and vandalism against their landlords, "foot dragging, and false deference."¹⁰ Elsewhere, peasants have presented their political demands more openly and aggressively. Contrary to Marx's expectations, the supposedly conservative peasantry was a critical actor in most twentieth-century revolutions, including communist upheavals in China, Vietnam, and Cuba, as well as in less radical insurgencies in Bolivia and Mexico.¹¹ More recently, they have been the backbone of guerrilla movements in Colombia, El Salvador, Peru, Cambodia, Nepal, the Philippines, and parts of India. In the mid-1990s, *Zapatista* rebels from the indigenous communities of Chiapas, Mexico, established a de facto zone of self-rule and forced the national government to the negotiating table. And in scores of other LDCs, ranging from India to Ecuador, well-organized peasant groups have also become influential actors in democratic political systems.

We will examine the role of the peasantry in revolutionary movements in greater detail in Chapter 7. For now, however, suffice it to say that peasants are neither inherently conservative nor intrinsically radical. Rather, they vary considerably in their ideological propensities and their capacity for collective political action. To understand why peasants so often accept the political status quo, while others choose to resist or even rebel, we must first examine the relationship between the powerful and the weak in the countryside. Although traditional landlords frequently exploit their tenants or neighboring smallholders, mutually understood boundaries usually limit the extent of that exploitation. Links between landlords and peasants are usually grounded in long-standing patron–client relationships involving reciprocal obligations.

Despite the landlords' superior power, these relationships are not always exploitative. For example, landowners frequently provide their tenants with land and financial credit in return for labor on their estate. And they may fund religious festivals or serve as godparents of their tenants' children.

As long as landlords fulfill their obligations, peasants generally accept the traditional order despite its many injustices. However, should rural modernization and the commercialization of agriculture induce rural patrons to cease discharging their traditional responsibilities, the peasantry may conclude that the previously existing "moral economy" has failed them.¹² In some cases, rural modernization may also give landlords (who can afford farm machinery and irrigation pumps) a competitive advantage over peasants (who cannot) and eventually force the smallholders off the land. Eric Wolf has noted that the transition from feudal or semifeudal rural relations to capitalist economic arrangements often strips peasants of the certainty and protection afforded them by the old order (even an unjust old order). Frequently, the result is rural upheaval. Thus, he argued, revolutions in China, Vietnam, Cuba, Mexico, and other Third World nations originated with the threats to the peasants' traditional way of life posed by the rise of rural capitalism.¹³

This in no way suggests that rural modernization and the transition to capitalism *always* radicalize the peasantry or drive them to revolutionary activity. But when peasants feel that their way of life is threatened, they will resist change or at least try to channel it into forms more beneficial to their interests. How effectively they engage in collective political action and how radical or moderate their demands are depend on a number of factors: the extent to which they perceive themselves to be exploited; how desperate their economic condition is; the degree of internal cohesion and cooperation within their communities; their ability to form political linkages with peasants in neighboring villages or in other parts of the country; the extent to which they forge political ties with nonpeasant groups and leaders; the type of outside groups with whom they ally (be it the Catholic Church in the Philippines or Maoist revolutionaries in parts of rural India); the responsiveness of the political system to their demands; and the types of political options that the political order affords them.

The last two factors suggest that the probability of radical peasant insurrection depends as much on the quality of the political system as it does on the nature of the peasantry. Given a meaningful opportunity to secure change by working within the existing political system, few peasants will choose to join revolutionary movements, since that would endanger their lives and those of their families. In short, revolution is an act of desperation normally entered into only when other options are unavailable. It is perhaps for that reason that no democratic political system has ever fallen to revolutionary insurgency.

In recent decades, the spread of the mass media throughout the countryside, increased rural educational levels, and the broadening of voting rights in numerous LDCs (such as extending the vote to illiterates) have greatly increased the political influence of peasant voters in electoral democracies. In countries such as India, Turkey, Bolivia, and Thailand, politicians must now

consider the interests of the rural poor more seriously. Still, voting power is of little use in many nondemocratic nations in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. And even in competitive party systems, the peasantry's political power is usually not proportional to their numbers.

On the whole, the range of peasant political activity runs the gamut from the far Left to the far Right, from peaceful to violent. As Samuel Huntington has noted, "The peasantry . . . may be the bulwark of the status quo or the shock troops of revolution. Which role the peasant plays is determined by the extent to which the existing system meets his immediate economic and material needs as he sees them."¹⁴ In India, for example, many peasants support the BJP—a conservative, Hindu fundamentalist party (see Chapter 3). In Latin America, on the other hand, peasants often vote for moderately left-of-center candidates. And in countries such as China, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Colombia, still other peasants have supported revolutionary insurrections. Whatever their political inclinations, the peasants' economic and political concerns usually revolve around four broad issues: the prices they receive for their crops, consumer prices (of goods they buy), taxes, and the availability of land. The issue of land has been the most volatile and the most critical to the political stability of many Third World nations, and it is to this issue that we now turn our attention.

THE POLITICS OF AGRARIAN REFORM

In those areas of the Third World where landownership is highly concentrated, agrarian reform has long been an issue in the national political debate. Agrarian reform is composed of two components. First, the most important element is land reform, which involves the redistribution of agricultural land—generally from large landowners or from public property—to land-hungry peasants, either as family plots or as collective farms. Second, in order for land recipients to farm their plots successfully, the government usually must provide them with some mix of technical assistance, credit, improved access to markets, and social services (such as health care). To be sure, the pressure for agrarian reform has waxed and waned and other models of rural development have become more popular in recent years. Still, the issue lingers in numerous LDCs.

Patterns of Land Concentration

In much of the Third World, especially Asia, landless peasants constitute a large portion of the rural population. For example, about half of Bangladesh's rural population and 40 percent of India's are landless. In addition, millions of peasant smallholders own plots too small to support their families adequately.

Concentrated land ownership is most pronounced in Latin America, where large estates control a substantial proportion of the region's farmland. In Brazil, for example, slightly over 3 percent of the nation's farms, each

exceeding 500 hectares (about 1,250 acres),* control 56 percent of the nation's farmland.¹⁵ Beginning in 1995 several government administrations have introduced modest agrarian reforms that have distributed land to thousands of landless or land-hungry peasant families. To some extent, these programs have been a response to the emergence of the MST (the Landless Workers' Movement). Founded in the mid-1980s, the MST represents landless workers throughout the country and, with a current membership of some 1.5 million people (the largest social movement in Latin America), it has placed substantial pressure on the government. Yet, to this point, the government's reform efforts have been more than matched by the expanded acquisition of farm land by Brazil's agribusiness, mostly aimed at exports. In fact, the 2006 agricultural census (the country's most recent) revealed that land concentration had actually increased in the previous decade.

With different historical traditions and far higher population density, Asia does not have agricultural units as large as Brazil's or Argentina's. In nations such as Indonesia, India, and Pakistan, farm holdings have rarely exceeded 50 hectares.¹⁶ In Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated countries, the largest farms are relatively small, rarely exceeding 5–10 hectares. Yet less than 3 percent of these units controlled more than 25 percent of the country's agricultural land. In the Philippines, similar data showed 3.4 percent of the country's farms accounting for 26 percent of the land.

Patterns of land ownership vary widely in Africa, depending in part on how extensively European colonial rule concentrated land in the hands of white settlers. But, a study of Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Rwanda noted that approximately one-quarter of their total farm population was either landless or virtually landless (making them dependent on the landlords for either wage labor or tenancy).¹⁷

The Case for Agrarian Reform

Facing powerful landed elites and their political allies, who oppose land redistribution, proponents of reform have defended their position on several grounds, including social justice and equity, greater political stability, improved agricultural productivity, economic growth, and preservation of the environment.

Social Justice and Equity Given the concentration of agricultural holdings in Latin America and parts of Africa and Asia, many analysts feel there is a *prima facie* case for some form of land redistribution for the sake of social justice and human rights. The millions of rural families with little or no land are among the poorest of the poor, trapped in a web of malnutrition and illiteracy. Usually they are politically powerless as well, controlled by landlords or local political bosses. For those peasants, agrarian reform is a fundamental step toward achieving greater political and socioeconomic justice.

*A hectare, rather than an acre, is the standard measurement of farmland area in most of the world. One hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres.

Political Stability From the perspective of government policy makers, a more compelling justification for agrarian reform has been that it reduces the likelihood of peasant unrest. Samuel Huntington starkly linked land reform to political stability:

Where the conditions of land tenure are equitable and provide a viable living for the peasant, revolution is unlikely. Where they are inequitable and where the peasant lives in poverty and suffering, revolution is likely, if not inevitable, unless the government takes prompt measures to remedy those conditions.¹⁸

Similarly, a recent study by the World Bank warns that "social costs of failing to [implement agrarian] reform often have included peasant uprisings and civil wars."¹⁹ Yet, governments are often indifferent to the injustices of land tenure patterns until there is a looming threat of peasant mobilization.

Productivity One of the most hotly debated aspects of land reform is its effect on agricultural productivity. Opponents of agrarian reform maintain that land redistribution lowers agricultural output, thereby diminishing food supplies for the cities and curtailing export earnings. Citing "economies of scale," they argue that large agricultural units are generally more productive than smallholdings because they are more easily mechanized and use rural infrastructure (such as irrigation and roads) more effectively.

Advocates of agrarian reform counter that, in fact, smallholders are generally more efficient producers than larger landlords. Over the years, most empirical studies have found that when small and large farm units are compared *within* Latin American, Asian, and African countries, labor-intensive smallholders (peasants who devote large amounts of physical labor on small land units) usually have higher yields per acre than large-scale, capital-intensive (mechanized) producers.²⁰ Peasant landholders tend to farm their plots very intensively because their families' living standards depend on raising productivity. This does not mean that small peasant-run units are *always* more efficient. Smaller farm units tend to outperform larger farms in growing vegetables and legumes, which are best cultivated by hand labor. But ranching and cultivation of crops suitable for mechanical harvesting—such as sugar, wheat, and rice—are usually more efficiently farmed on large plantations.

The economic efficiency of small farms may surprise many Americans accustomed to believing that larger units are inherently more productive. But in underdeveloped rural societies with a surplus of labor (i.e., many underemployed people who are willing to work for low wages), it is often more cost-effective to use family or hired labor intensively rather than invest in machinery. Out of economic necessity, peasant cultivators work hard, exploiting their own family labor. On the other hand, most large, mechanized estates are farmed by hired laborers, who do not gain directly from raising productivity.

In recent decades, the disparity between large and small units in land productivity has diminished. But even if large farm units become more efficient than smaller units (as measured by yield per acre), smallholding operations

would still be more productive to society than large landlords in other ways. For example, large landowners tend to import a sizable portion of their machinery, fuel, and agrochemicals, thereby expending much of the country's scarce foreign exchange. On the other hand, peasant farms draw upon family labor, a cheap input found in abundance. It is for this reason that the former president of the Overseas Development Council argued that "a land and capital scarce (but population plentiful) country should favor 40 two-and-a-half acre farms over a single-owner 100-acre farm in order to make optimum use of available land, labor, and capital."²¹

Economic Growth In addition to its positive effect on agricultural productivity, land redistribution often brings broader benefits to the overall economies of developing countries. For example, in nations such as Bolivia and Cuba, agrarian reform gave peasants a greater economic stake in the countryside, thereby reducing rural-to-urban migration and alleviating the tremendous strain on resources experienced by so many Third World cities (discussed later in this chapter).

When properly implemented, agrarian reform improves the living standards of the rural poor. And, as their purchasing power increases, they consume more of their country's manufactured goods, thereby stimulating industrial growth. Indeed, Japan's, Taiwan's, and South Korea's postwar economic booms were initially enhanced by land reforms. At the same time, reform also improved income equality in those East Asian nations. That equality brought political stability and supported rapid economic growth. In contrast, Latin America's pattern of concentrated landownership has contributed to the region's highly inequitable income distribution, extensive rural poverty, and lower economic growth.

Environmental Preservation Another, more recent, argument for agrarian reform relates to environmental protection. For example, Brazilian ranchers and farmers deliberately burn tracts of the Amazonian rainforest to clear land for agriculture, annually destroying a forest area equal to the size of New Jersey. The fires are so vast that they contribute to the *greenhouse effect* on world climate. Although large landowners create a substantial portion of this burn-off, peasant settlers also contribute. Driven out of the nation's poorest regions by desperation, land-hungry peasants colonize the jungle in search of a better life. Once there, however, they discover that cleared jungle soil quickly loses its nutrients. So, they must soon move on, clearing yet more forest land. Land reform in Brazil's nonforested regions would reduce landlessness and give tenant farmers a greater stake in the land they farm, thus reducing migration to the Amazonian basin.

The Decline of Agrarian Reform

Even though numerous social scientists, UN agencies, and Third World political leaders have hailed the potential benefits of land reform, the number of extensive programs has remained limited and a number of those that have been tried have

failed. Usually, the extent, if any, of land reform is not determined by factors such as agricultural productivity or the effects of reform on economic growth. Rather it is most influenced by the balance of political power between peasants and landlords, by the government's perception of whether land redistribution would help or hurt it, and often by the policies of powerful First World economic donors. Perhaps the most successful agrarian reform programs were initiated in East Asia in the decade or so following World War II. Fearing the spread of Chinese-style peasant revolutions, the U.S. occupation forces introduced far-reaching land redistribution in Japan, and Washington strongly endorsed reform in South Korea and Taiwan, both facing external communist threats, respectively, from North Korea and China. In all three countries landlords were in an unusually weak position: Japanese landlords were in no position to oppose the U.S. military occupation; Korean landlords were discredited at home because most had supported the Japanese invasion in World War II; and in Taiwan, the former landed elite had just fled their defeat on the Chinese mainland. All three nations were heavily dependent on the United States, which was pressuring them to implement or accept reform. The resulting agrarian reforms were very extensive and very successful: agricultural production increased, peasant living standards rose, peasant consumption helped fuel industrial growth, and the rural poor became pillars of support for the government.

Many experts as well as institutions such as the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Bank continue to support expanded agrarian reform in the developing world. Arguing that current national agricultural policies stress increased production to the exclusion of other important needs, such as improving the living standard of the rural poor and sustaining the environment, the FAO sees agrarian reform as central to these other objectives. As it noted at a 2006 conference on agrarian reform and rural development,

While globalization, industrialization, and (often subsidized) commercial agriculture are creating wealth for some, they are also dramatically increasing the socio-economic disparities within and between countries, further exacerbating land concentration . . . Investment has tended to favor the development of the industrial, urban and service and often military sectors, at the expense of agriculture and rural development.²²

Yet, since the 1970s programs in Africa (including Ethiopia and South Africa), Asia (including India and the Philippines), Latin America (Chile, Peru, and Venezuela), and the Middle East (Egypt and Iran) have been more limited and less successful. In those countries landed elites have had enough political and economic power to water down reform efforts. At the same time peasants are often poorly organized and unable to exert much pressure on their governments. And rarely has the United States had the leverage (or perhaps the desire) to push for agrarian reform, as it did in East Asia in the postwar years. Even in the few cases where it did have significant influence—when it supported the counterinsurgencies in South Vietnam and El Salvador—it chose not to demand those governments carry out substantial land reform. For all these reasons worldwide support for agrarian reform has declined significantly.

The most comprehensive agrarian reform programs have been introduced by revolutionary movements and governments. These include Bolivia, China, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. In all of these, peasants were an important, sometimes dominant, part of the revolutionary struggle. At the same time, the revolutions destroyed the landlord's political and economic powers, thereby eliminating a roadblock that so often has limited or derailed reform efforts throughout Asia and Latin America. But, the outcome of revolutionary change often was not what most peasants had fought and died for. They had hoped or expected the large estates to be divided into peasant family farms. Instead, the new revolutionary governments pressured or forced the peasantry to join collective farms of some sort—principally cooperatives or state farms. In China, Ethiopia, Russia, and Vietnam, tens of thousands of peasants died resisting collectivization. Moreover, in most cases collective farms were not efficient. Indeed, China's forced collectivization during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) caused such a sharp drop in food production that perhaps 25 million people died of starvation.

Eventually several communist regimes (including China, Vietnam, and, more recently, Cuba) have recognized these failures and have essentially privatized (de-collectivized) many or all farm units—breaking up communes, collectives, state farms, and other government-imposed production units—returning the land to peasant-controlled family plots. In both China and Vietnam the decollectivization of agriculture resulted in greater food production and significant improvements in the peasants' standard of living.

CROP PRICING: ANOTHER APPROACH TO RURAL POVERTY

For several decades, then, reform efforts have shifted from land redistribution to other approaches to reducing rural poverty. We will focus here on one important policy area, crop pricing. Clearly, the price they get for their crops is critically important to farmers of all types—from large landlords to peasant smallholders. A steep increase in the price of rice or potatoes will increase rural producers' incomes, while a sharp price decline will reduce peasant living standards and, in the worst case, cause them to lose their farms. In numerous countries prices for food crops are determined the same way as for most goods, by free-market forces. But in other nations—from the United States and Japan to South Korea—governments subsidize farming (paying cash benefits to farmers or even guaranteeing them a minimum selling price for their crop). One of the purposes of these subsidies is to guarantee the country a sufficient supply of basic foods. At the same time, in such cases the government's motive is also securing peasant support.

On the other hand, in many LDCs government policy has been to *lower* food prices in order to satisfy the urban population. Anxious to ensure a supply of cheap food for city dwellers, governments in Africa and the Middle

East especially have imposed price controls on food staples such as rice, potatoes, and sugar. These controls are also designed to promote industrialization by providing workers with cheap food, thereby helping employers keep wages down and facilitating greater capital investment.²³ But by holding crop prices below their free-market levels, these controls have further impoverished peasant producers.

In Africa, governments have commonly also controlled the sale of various export crops, forcing farmers to sell their produce to the state at controlled price and then exporting it for the higher (free-market) world price, pocketing the price difference as a *de facto* tax. One early study found that many African farmers in years past received less than two-thirds, and in some cases less than half, of the value of their export crops.²⁴ But although price controls provide the urban poor and middle class with cheaper food and generate government revenues from exports, they also have perverse effects. They not only lower the incomes of poor farmers but are a disincentive to greater food production by small and large farmers alike. Throughout Africa, price controls have reduced food output by driving some farmers out of business and reducing production incentives for those who remain. For decades, per-capita food production declined, and the continent became increasingly dependent on food imports and foreign aid. While there is no single cause for that deterioration, a number of studies of African famines argue that government price controls and inefficient government bureaucracies have greatly aggravated the problem.²⁵

But once governments embark on the path of commodity price controls, they are frequently trapped in a conflict between short-term political pressures and long-term production needs. Lifting price controls results in higher prices for basic foods. Consequently, when governments remove them—often under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—they often face riots or other protests by irate, urban consumers. Not surprisingly, for many years few governments were willing to risk such unrest, particularly because the urban middle class—a group also adversely affected by such price hikes—is such a powerful political force. In the longer term, however, higher crop prices stimulate greater food production, ultimately causing food prices to come down. Since the 1980s, as numerous developing nations have introduced neoliberal economic policies (reducing government economic intervention), most of them have slashed or eliminated agricultural price controls (see Chapter 9 on neoliberal reforms).^{*} Famines continue to plague parts of Africa, but the causes are usually a combination of climate problems (drought or, occasionally, flooding) and internal wars, a deadly combination currently taking place in Somalia.

^{*}Neoliberalism rejects most of the state intervention in the economy (including state regulation and ownership of key economic sectors) that previously prevailed in many developing countries and, instead, favors free-market mechanisms.

THE FUTURE OF THE RURAL POOR

For decades, Third World development policies have emphasized industrial growth and urban modernization, often to the detriment of the rural sector. Frequently, the result has been stagnant agricultural production, growing food imports, rural poverty, and heavy rural-urban migration. Most notably in Africa and Latin America, government bias in favor of urban areas, along with the forces of capitalist modernization, have driven many peasants into the urban slums in a process known as *proletarianization*. In some instances, rural poverty has led to peasant insurrections. Pessimistic scholars have predicted the inevitable spread of large, mechanized farms to the detriment of peasant family farming.

More recently, however, research in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Colombia has revealed that, in at least some regions, innovative peasants have adapted skillfully to the forces of rural capitalism and modernization, taking advantage of new commercial opportunities to compete successfully in the marketplace. In Africa and Asia, peasant smallholders remain an even more important component of rural society. Rather than abandoning the peasantry as a relic of history, Third World governments and international agencies need to promote balanced economic and political development that gives proper weight to the rural poor. Since the 1990s, recurring hunger and malnutrition in the LDCs have led some important foreign-aid donors to rethink their attitudes toward peasant farming. Despite the large landholders' financial advantages and widespread government neglect of peasant farming, smallholders still produce about 60 percent of the food consumed in the developing world. Coming into the July 2009 G8 summit of the world's major economic powers, its participants pledged \$15 billion in contributions over 3 years to aid food production, largely by peasants, in Africa and other very poor developing nations. At the summit itself, President Obama convinced the members to raise that pledge to \$20 billion. The purpose of that aid would be to "transform traditional aid beyond simply donated [food to alleviate famines] to assistance building infrastructure and training farmers to grow their own food and to get it to market more efficiently."²⁶ Several months later (October 2009), Bill Gates announced that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation would be changing its philanthropic focus from fighting Third World diseases to aiding the LDCs' poor farmers, whom he described as the key to eradicating world hunger.

While many analysts hailed this new emphasis on Third World food production, some respected NGOs, such as Oxfam, reacted skeptically. To begin with, they considered the \$20 billion totally inadequate, particularly because the developing world had lost far more than that amount in the current global financial crisis. Second, G8 countries had a notoriously poor record of coming through with the aid pledged at previous G8 (and other) meetings. In a worst-case example, of all the aid that Italy has pledged in previous G8 summits over the years, it has delivered only three percent. Furthermore, too many of the countries targeted for such aid have notorious

records of government corruption that siphons off large portions of the foreign assistance. Finally, a significant portion of foreign aid is grabbed by the most politically well-connected larger farmers, rather than by those who need it the most or can best use it. Still, at the very least, G8 nations have come to realize that advancing long-neglected peasant agriculture is crucial to Third World development. Finally, until the vast gaps between rural and urban income, education, housing, sanitation, and health care are reduced, large portions of the rural poor will continue to flood into the cities.

RAPID URBANIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF THE URBAN POOR

Each day, in the villages of Bangladesh, China, Kenya, Egypt, and Brazil, thousands of young men and women pack up their meager belongings and board buses, trucks, or trains for the long trip to, respectively, Dhaka, Shanghai, Nairobi, Cairo, or Rio. Often they travel alone, sometimes with family or friends. They are a part of the largest and most dramatic tidal wave of human migration in world history. Despairing of any hope for a better life in the countryside and seeking new opportunities for themselves and their children, millions of villagers leave the world they have known for the uncertainties of the city. In Africa, refugees fleeing civil wars and famine have augmented the legions of migrants. In the aftermath of Rwanda's 1994 ethnic genocide, that country's urban population grew by an astounding 11.6 percent *annually* between 2000 and 2005. From 2000 to 2050, the proportion of Rwanda's population living in urban areas will climb from only 19 to 43 percent.²⁷ At the same time, as migration adds to the size of Third World cities, urban populations are also growing as a result of "natural increase"—the annual total of births minus deaths—among those already living in cities.

THE THIRD WORLD'S URBAN EXPLOSION

Not long ago, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) looked back to a prediction that it had made in 1997: "The growth of cities," it had said, "will be the single largest influence on development in the 21st century." Looking back, the Fund observed, "This statement is proving more accurate by the day." In 2008, the number of people living in cities throughout the world exceeded the rural population for the first time in human history. In developing countries the proportion of city dwellers is now slightly over 40 percent, but it will pass 50 percent by 2017.

Most migrants maintain close links with their rural roots long after they have left the countryside. Some of them intend to accumulate savings and eventually return to their villages. "Others alternate between city and country in a permanent pendular pattern."²⁸ Indeed, in various parts of West Africa and Southeast Asia, more than half the urban migrants are temporary, including

those who repeatedly circulate between village and city. In China prior to the 1980s, government restrictions made it difficult to migrate. Even now, most urban migrants still live in a bureaucratic limbo without assurance of permanence. Known as China's "floating population," they currently number more than 150 million and that figure is expected to double by 2025. Some stay permanently, but most do not because of their marginal legal status. Although not officially counted as part of the urban population (because their government documents supposedly restrict their residence to their home villages), they actually account for about one-fifth of China's urban residents. In Shanghai, China's largest city and its economic hub, 6 million migrants constitute one-third of the population. In contrast, Latin America's cityward migrants tend to settle permanently. Whatever their initial aspirations, the Third World's migrants continue to crowd the urban slums and shantytowns that they have come to call home.

Swelled by the influx of migrants and by natural increases, Third World urban populations have ballooned and will continue to grow rapidly in the coming years. Currently, 11 of the world's 15 largest metropolitan areas are in the Third World.* Table 6.1 shows that between 2000 and 2050, the urban population of the world's developed nations are expected to grow by about 230 million, an increase of approximately 26 percent. By contrast, Third World cities will expand by 163 percent (from nearly 2 billion people to almost 5.2 billion). During the first half of this century, urban growth will slow down in both regions, but Third World cities will continue to grow about 5–6 times faster than in industrialized nations. At the start of this century, less

TABLE 6.1

Urbanization in the Developed and Less Developed Worlds

	2000	2025 (Estimate)	2050 (Estimate)
Urban Population			
Developed Countries	869,233,000	1,013,700,000	1,099,730,000
Less Developed Countries	1,968,198,000	3,522,225,000	5,186,151,000
Percentage Urban			
Developed Countries	72.7	79.4	86.2
Less Developed Countries	40.0	52.3	65.9

Source: United Nations Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision Population Database*.

*Different sources have widely varying populations for the world's largest cities and for their rank. In large part this depends on whether they are measuring just the official population of the city in question or whether they are reporting the much larger population of the "metropolitan areas" ("urban agglomerations"). The urban populations and rankings discussed in this chapter mostly refer to the metropolitan areas.

than one-half of the LDCs' population (40 percent) lived in cities, but by mid-century that figure will increase to 66 percent.

The magnitude of that expansion has placed tremendous strains on public services, housing, public health, and personal safety in these large cities. In Latin America, the rate of growth was most rapid in the middle of the twentieth century, when some primary cities such as Bogotá and Lima nearly doubled their populations in a single decade (1950–1960). While the rate of growth in the region's largest metropolises has slowed, in absolute terms there is still considerable migration. African cities, starting from a smaller base, expanded at an even faster pace. Between 1960 and 1983, Kinshasa (Congo) grew by nearly 600 percent and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) by more than 800 percent. Today, a number of major Third World cities are still doubling their populations in two decades or less.

As Table 6.2 indicates (column 2), Latin America and the Caribbean are by far the most urbanized regions in the developing world, having reached 80 percent in 2010. At that time, South-Central Asia's urban population (32 percent of the national total), Sub-Saharan Africa's (37 percent), and East Asia's (50 percent) constituted a far lower percentage of the national population than in Latin America (Table 6.2, column 2). On the other hand, cities in those regions are now growing far more rapidly and by 2050, they will have closed the gap with Latin America considerably (see columns 2 and 3). In 1960, only two African cities had more than 1 million people. But by 1983, nine cities in the region reached or surpassed that size.²⁹ As Table 6.3 indicates, the populations of a number of Sub-Saharan African metropolises—including Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Cairo, and Lagos (Nigeria)—will continue to skyrocket. Indeed, greater Lagos and Cairo are expected to have populations exceeding 24 million and 16 million, respectively, by 2015, making them two of the world's largest megacities.³⁰

TABLE 6.2

Percentage of the Third World's Population in Urban Areas (by Region)

Region	Percentage Urban 1975	Percentage Urban 2010	Percentage Urban 2050 (Projected)
Third World	27	45	66
North Africa	38	51	71
East Asia	23	50	74
Latin America and the Caribbean	61	80	89
South-Central Asia	22	32	56
Sub-Saharan Africa	22	37	60

Source: United Nations Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision Population Database*.

TABLE 6.3

Populations of Third World Metropolitan Areas, 1995–2015

City	Population	
	1995	2015
Mexico City	16,562,000	19,180,000
Tegucigalpa	995,000	2,016,000
Cairo	9,690,000	16,530,000
Casablanca	3,101,000	4,835,000
Addis Ababa	2,431,000	6,578,000
Lagos	10,287,000	24,640,000
Bangkok	6,547,000	9,844,000
Dhaka	8,545,000	19,486,000

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 1998* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 174–175.

Of course, *within* each Third World region, the proportion of people residing in cities also varies considerably. As Table 6.4 (column 2) indicates, in 2010 the urban population's share of the national total ranged from 17 percent in Ethiopia to 89 percent in Chile. While Africa and Asia are generally less urbanized than Latin America, their cities are now growing at a faster rate. Ethiopia's urban population is projected to grow from 17 percent of the nation's total in 2010 to 42 percent by mid-century. Sudan, Indonesia, and China were less than 20 percent urban in 1975, but climbed to more than 40 percent in 2010 and will reach somewhere between 73 and 79 percent by 2050.

TABLE 6.4

Percentage of the Population Living in Urban Areas (by Country)

Country	Percentage Urban 1975	Percentage Urban 2010	Percentage Urban 2050 (Projected)
Egypt	39	43	62
Ethiopia	10	17	42
Sudan	19	40	74
Indonesia	19	44	79
China	17	47	73
Chile	78	89	94
Dominican Republic	46	69	86

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 2007*, Table 5; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision*.

THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN GROWTH

This chapter examines two important aspects of Third World urban politics. First, it looks at the problems that exploding urban populations present to political leaders and government planners. Specifically, it asks how poor countries can provide city dwellers with needed jobs, housing, sanitation, and other basic services, while also protecting them from crime. What is the government's role in those areas, and how do state policies interact with private-sector activities and self-help efforts? Second, we examine the political attitudes and behavior of the urban lower classes, who account for the majority of the Third World's city population. To what extent do the inhabitants of urban shantytowns and slums have political orientations that are distinct from both those of the rural poor and those of the urban middle and upper classes? Is rapid urbanization likely to contribute to political development, or does it carry the seeds of political instability?

THE SEARCH FOR EMPLOYMENT

It is worth remembering that just like today's LDCs, Western nations experienced an urban explosion from the 1870s to the start of World War I (1914). But rapid urbanization in Europe and North America occurred during an era of unprecedented industrialization and economic growth. As capitalism came of age, it needed the giant wave of migrant and immigrant laborers. By contrast, most contemporary developing countries are unable to provide sufficient employment to their rapidly expanding urban workforce.

To be sure, many people do find factory jobs, and some low-income workers achieve impressive upward mobility, but they are the exception. Most of the urban poor must engage in an ongoing struggle for economic survival. For example, even during Mexico's impressive economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s, the country's expanding modern sector was able to provide regular employment for only about half the people seeking to enter the urban workforce. The severe recessions that gripped Africa and Latin America in the 1980s, parts of Asia in the late 1990s, and much of the world today all exacerbated urban poverty, as industrial employment plummeted in scores of countries. Furthermore, at times, various countries in Latin America and Africa have suffered from high rates of inflation, making it difficult for many people, even those who were regularly employed, to support their families adequately.

Many of the urban poor who are unable to find work in the so-called *formal sector* of the urban economy (the government and modern, private-sector enterprises) turn to the *informal economy* for jobs. As noted in Chapter 5, this sector is defined as the part of the economy that is "unregulated by the institutions of society [most notably the state], in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated" and taxed.³¹ Most of the workers in the informal economy are self-employed (an estimated 70 percent) in occupations ranging from garbage recyclers to shoeshine boys, street vendors, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, and

drivers of unlicensed taxis. Others work in "underground" factories or other businesses that operate outside the law.

Of course, even cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Milan in the industrialized world have informal sectors, including unlicensed street vendors, underground sweatshops, and other endeavors that are "off the books." In the Third World, however, the informal economy provides a substantial proportion of urban jobs. According to the World Bank, the informal sector may generate as much as 70 percent of urban employment and 30 percent of the LDCs' gross domestic product.³²

In the vast garbage dumps of Cairo and Mexico City, hordes of entrepreneurs sift through the refuse looking to recycle marketable materials. On the commercial boulevards of Manila (Philippines) and Nairobi (Kenya), an army of street vendors sells food, household appliances, and bootleg DVDs. In Lagos and Lahore (Pakistan), shoemakers and carpenters, working out of their homes, sell their wares to appreciative clients. All belong to the informal economy. While outside observers once assumed that people working in this sector were particularly impoverished, we now know that their earning power varies greatly and that some of them have higher incomes than the average factory worker does.

Over the years, government planners and social scientists have debated the informal economy's merits and faults. Critics point out that its workers are not protected by minimum-wage laws and do not have access to government health and welfare programs such as Social Security. Proponents respond that the informal economy not only employs vast numbers of people who would otherwise have no work, but it also contributes a substantial proportion of the Third World's consumer goods and services. Consequently, these analysts argue, Third World governments should cease trying to regulate and license the informal sector and instead should allow it to flourish and expand.

Another source of employment is the public sector. Third World governments employ significant numbers of white-collar workers and bureaucrats. These jobs are a boon to the urban middle class since there is not enough work in the private sector. In addition, many governments own various economic enterprises (parastatals)—including petroleum production, railroads, electric power plants, and steel mills—which provide relatively well-paid, blue-collar jobs in economies plagued by high unemployment.

Unfortunately, there are two major problems with public-sector employment. First, in their efforts to gain popular support, the government or the ruling party has often padded bureaucratic and parastatal payrolls with unneeded employees. While this creates badly needed jobs, it adds to government budget deficits and makes these institutions highly inefficient. Second, public-sector employment is frequently treated as a political plum, with jobs going to activists in the ruling party and government supporters, rather than to the most qualified applicants. In many countries, government bureaucracies and parastatals hire unneeded white-collar workers as a form of political patronage. In fact, many employees never show up except to collect their paychecks. At one time, some 40 percent of Sierra Leone's government bureaucrats and state workers were "ghosts"—employees who were paid but never worked.

In recent decades, faced with spiraling government spending and large external debts, most LDCs have been forced to reduce the size of their state sectors substantially. Although these cuts were usually necessary in order to cut huge government budget deficits and reduce inflation, they have imposed a heavy burden on white- and blue-collar workers who have been laid off and on young workers who faced more limited opportunities for future employment.

Only in communist countries such as China and Cuba has the state been a major employer of blue-collar workers. Those governments have commonly considered employment to be a fundamental workers' right and an important source of legitimacy for the system. Until recently, some communist governments created as many jobs as necessary to achieve full, or nearly full, employment, no matter how economically inefficient many of these jobs might be. Under China's "iron rice bowl" policy, factory workers were essentially guaranteed a job for life. But as the country has moved toward a capitalist economy, it has closed many inefficient plants and no longer guarantees workers their employment. In China, millions of workers have been laid off from state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and Cuba has announced plans to shed up to 1 million government employees in the coming years.

Encouraged or pressured by the IMF, the World Bank, and private foreign banks, many heavily indebted African and Latin American countries have adopted macroeconomic policies, designed to reduce inflation rates. These measures seek to lower large budgetary and trade deficits by lowering government spending—including cuts in public-sector employment and the privatizing of many state enterprises (selling them to private investors). These policies—officially called structural adjustment and monetary stabilization programs, but widely known as austerity programs—are often successful in curbing high inflation rates (which sometimes have exceeded 100 percent annually). Curbing rampant inflation obviously helps consumers, especially the poor. But at the same time, stabilization entails major cutbacks in government and private-sector employment. For example, when the Mexican government privatized the previously state-owned steel industry, the new owners laid off half of the workforce.

THE URBAN POOR'S STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING

Of all the challenges facing the urban poor, particularly the wave of new migrants, few are more pressing than finding adequate housing. With many metropolitan areas doubling in size every 10 to 25 years, private-sector housing cannot possibly expand fast enough to meet the need. Besides, most of the new homes and apartment houses built for private sale or rental are built for the middle and upper classes, since there is little profit to be made in building low-income housing. At the same time, although many Third World governments have invested in public housing, their rents are commonly too high for low-income families to afford. So, lacking adequate options in both the private and state sectors, many of the urban poor live in squatter settlements and other

forms of "self-help" (occupant-built) housing, collectively called "spontaneous shelter." Others crowd into existing urban slums (decaying tenements). The poorest city dwellers, lacking the resources to rent or build, are often homeless, residing in doorways, unused construction material, or the like. In the "City of the Dead"—a series of huge cemeteries on Cairo's outskirts—hundreds of thousands of the city's poor (largely migrants) live among the cemeteries' tombs. They are allowed to live there rent-free (but with no basic services) in return for guarding and maintaining the tombs.

In all, the total population of slum dwellers (living either in squatter settlements or dilapidated older housing) and homeless persons account for close to half the population of Third World cities. About 30 percent of the urban population in North Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean live in slum (substandard) housing. That number rises to nearly 60 percent in South Asia and more than 70 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Looking at individual nations, about 40 percent of the urban populations live in slums or squatter settlements in Brazil, Egypt, and Turkey. That figure rises to about 55 percent in India, 70–80 percent in Kenya, Pakistan, and Nigeria, and over 90 percent in Afghanistan.³³ Millions of the LDCs' urban poor, including many of them who have built their own homes, have no direct access to clean water or sanitation facilities.

In recent decades some countries have reduced their slum population by upgrading the quality of housing for many inhabitants and by providing drinking water and sanitation. Thus from 1990 to 2010 four North Africa countries (Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia) cut their slum dwelling population in half, from 20.8 million to 11.8 million. Throughout the LDCs, housing upgrading enabled 227 million people to escape urban slums between 2000 and 2010. But, at the same time some 282 million people were added to the slum population, meaning that the total number of slum dwellers actually increased by 55 million during that decade.³⁴

Today, the availability of basic urban services in low-income neighborhoods varies considerably from region to region. For example, a survey of eight low-income neighborhoods in Latin America—located in Rio de Janeiro and Aracaju (Brazil) as well as Santiago and Temuco (Chile)—found that nearly all of the inhabitants had running water and electricity. On the other hand, a parallel study of eight poor African neighborhoods—in the cities of Abidjan and Man (Côte d'Ivoire) and Nairobi and Kisumu (Kenya)—revealed that almost all the residents had to buy their drinking water. Similarly, very few homes in any of the eight African neighborhoods studied had electricity.³⁵ In light of these glaring needs, developing nations frequently have searched for appropriate state responses.

*While squatter settlements (also called shantytowns) are poor neighborhoods, not everyone living in them is poor. A minority of shantytown residents are white-collar workers or well-paid blue-collar workers. Some of them achieved upward mobility since first settling there, but have remained there because of attachments to friends and community.

Public Housing and the Role of the State

Throughout the developing world, many governments have constructed public housing to alleviate housing shortages. In China, workers in state enterprises are commonly assigned apartments linked to their employment. Cuba's revolutionary government has built large apartment blocks, some of them housing 25,000–40,000 persons on the outskirts of its largest cities. During Venezuela's petroleum boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government constructed as many as 34,000 urban housing units annually.³⁶ Hugo Chávez's populist government has built many additional units during the most recent oil boom. In the 1960s and 1970s, various African governments established housing agencies with far more limited resources.

In time, however, it has become clear that public housing cannot provide sufficient shelter for the poor, and, in some cases, it actually worsens their plight. In the capital cities of India, Senegal, and Nigeria, for example, government housing projects have often been designed to eradicate "urban blight," that is, "unsightly," low-income slums built near the city center. To make the central city more aesthetically pleasing to the political elite, urban planners, middle-class residents, and foreign tourists, the government has sometimes removed those slums and replaced them with government buildings or government-built middle-class housing. Rarely have the poor families who had been evicted from their homes subsequently secured a replacement in low-income public housing projects. Even those who received alternative housing were usually relocated on the edges of town, far removed from their workplace. Diana Patel describes how Zimbabwe's government periodically ousted the same squatters from their settlements in different parts of the nation's capital, in effect "chasing them around town." Instead, the urban poor often turn to self-built housing, generally in sprawling shantytowns located in remote parts of town. Many government planners, viewing these shacks from a middle-class perspective, believed that unless the squatters can afford "decent" urban housing with plumbing and multiple rooms for their families, they would be better off returning to the countryside.³⁷

To be sure, many of public housing projects do not serve the poor at all, housing, instead, lower-middle-class families. In order for a government to recoup its construction costs, it must sell or rent the new housing units at higher rates than the urban poor can afford. Consequently, the state faces two options: it can subsidize rents and mortgages to bring their cost down to a level within the reach of the poor, or it can rent or sell the dwellings to those who have enough money to live there without state subsidies, namely the middle class.

Although many governments provide some subsidized housing to the poor, these programs have several drawbacks and by nature must be limited. First, even when a government wants to subsidize substantial numbers of low-income units, it is too costly for most developing nations to sustain. For example, following the Cuban revolution, the government committed itself to providing new homes for the urban lower class. To demonstrate its generosity and gain public support, it poured funds into a number of large housing projects, while recouping only a fraction of the costs out of the low rents that the new tenants

paid. Projects such as Santiago's José Martí provided schools, day-care centers, theaters, clinics, and stores for its 40,000 inhabitants. However, by lavishing excessively "luxurious" housing on early recipients, the government soon ran out of funds for the many others needing shelter. Thus, the East Havana project, planned for 100,000 dwelling units, ultimately contained only 1,500. But even though the state lacked the resources to meet the country's housing needs, it prohibited private and self-help housing (i.e., units built by the owner) for many years. Not surprisingly, Cuba, like most communist countries, has chronic housing shortages. In 2008, however, president Raul Castro announced that thousands of Cuban families will be able to get title to state-owned homes as the government begins to reduce its role in housing. Three years later the government announced plans to allow Cubans to buy and sell their own homes.

Elsewhere, another problem is that (subsidized) public housing is often allocated to supporters of the ruling party or the government rather than on the basis of need. Because political patronage plays such an important role, police officers, government bureaucrats, and teachers are often among the first served.³⁸ Consequently, residents in state housing are frequently from the middle class. They have enough political connections to secure access to public housing and can also afford to pay higher rents than low-income families can.

With the exception of Hong Kong, Singapore, and several small, oil-rich Gulf states, the governments of other developing countries lack the resources to provide housing for a large segment of the urban poor. Consequently, many analysts believe that the state should not try to provide relatively costly, completed housing units to poor families, but instead should support cheaper alternatives that can serve far more people. With most LDCs cutting back government spending since the 1980s, the case for cheaper, but more widely disbursed, housing solutions has become even more powerful.

Spontaneous Housing

For years, many social scientists and urban planners have maintained that the most effective remedy for housing shortfalls in Third World cities is spontaneous (or self-built) shelter—that is, the very shantytowns and squatter settlements that are so widely viewed as urban blights. In cities throughout the developing world, the poor have built their own homes, sometimes with hired or volunteer assistance. While living in these dwellings, many proprietors, particularly in Africa, also rent part of their home to others. In some cases, the property owners are squatters, living on land that has been occupied illegally, often with the compliance of government authorities.

Spontaneous housing settlements range in size from a few isolated homes to communities of many thousands. For example, on the dried-up marshlands outside Mexico City, the municipality of Netzahualcóyotl began as an illegal squatter settlement in the 1940s. By 1970, it housed 600,000 people.³⁹ Organized protests eventually persuaded the national government to provide badly needed urban services and to grant the squatters legal title to their homes. Elsewhere, up to 40 percent of Nairobi's population and one-fourth to

one-third of the inhabitants of Jakarta, Karachi, and Lima live in squatter settlements. These homes, argued John F. C. Turner, often have been erroneously viewed by politicians and planners as a problem, when, in fact, they are a major part of the solution to urban housing needs.⁴⁰ Rather than building public housing, he insisted, Third World governments can serve many more people by removing the legal and political obstacles to spontaneous housing settlements, giving squatters title to their land, and helping residents upgrade the dwellings that they have built.

Self-built homes have several important advantages over public housing.⁴¹ First, they actually serve the poor, whereas public housing generally does not. Second, they afford occupants the opportunity to upgrade their homes continuously. For example, in Lima's vast network of shantytowns, one can observe many wood and straw shacks whose owners are building brick walls around them, slowly constructing a better home as funds become available. Third, precisely because they are self-built, these homes better address the needs and desires of their owners than do units built by government planners. Finally, squatter settlements have the churches, bars, and neighborhood stores that help create a sense of community, which is too often lacking in large, impersonal public housing projects. Accepting these arguments, over the years the governments of Peru, Brazil, and other nations have given millions of illegal squatters title to their plots of land and provided public services such as sewage and drinking water.

Sites-and-Services Programs

Other analysts who favored a more active role for the state view the Turner's thesis as a convenient excuse for governments that do not wish to spend much on the poor. Championing self-help housing charged these critics, merely perpetuated the status quo, and allowed the state to direct its limited housing resources toward the middle class.

Ultimately, many Third World governments, the World Bank, and foreign-aid donors have pursued a middle-ground policy that falls between providing expensive, fully built public housing units and a hands-off policy that leaves the government with little role to play. In countries as diverse as Colombia, India, Malawi, and Turkey, the state has sold or rented parcels of land to the poor that come with basic services such as running water, sewage, and electricity. Buyers then build their own homes on the sites as they do with spontaneous housing. In some cases, governments provide credit, technical assistance, or low-cost construction materials.

These "sites-and-services" programs have several obvious advantages. First, they allow the government to steer self-built housing to locations that are safe and environmentally sound. By contrast, unregulated spontaneous shelters in Caracas illustrate the dangers of nonzoned squatter settlements. There, more than half a million people live on precarious hillsides in shacks that are sometimes washed away by mudslides during the rainy season. Second, in contrast to many sprawling squatter communities, inhabitants of sites-and-services settlements have electricity, sanitation, and other basic

services from the outset. Furthermore, although occupants must purchase their sites, the lots are far more affordable than are fully built, state housing units.

THE PROBLEM OF URBAN CRIME

Escalating crime is a problem in many Latin American and African cities, but East Asia's major urban areas are generally safer than large American cities. In places such as Rio de Janeiro and Nairobi, large, well-armed youth gangs escalate the level of violence. For example, in Nairobi's massive Mathare slum (housing some 500,000 people), a recent war between two tribally based gangs resulted in 10 deaths and 600 homes burned to the ground in a period of 5 days. In many developing countries, crime is more than a personal concern. It has become an important political issue, eliciting mass demonstrations and angry demands for better protection from robbery and violent crime. As in the United States and other industrialized nations, the origins of criminal activity often lie in poverty, discrimination, income inequality, inadequate schools, and broken families. Its victims, of course, come from all social classes, rich and poor alike. However, the urban poor make up a disproportionate share of both the perpetrators and the victims. The confluence of poverty and social decay helps explain why rates of violent crime in much of Africa and Latin America are much higher than in Western Europe.

Nevertheless, some countries and regions do not fit that pattern. For example, homicide and rape rates are significantly higher in the United States than in a number of Third World countries such as Chile, Egypt, and Senegal. One possible explanation for such anomalies is that income *inequality* may be a more important factor influencing the crime rate than the *absolute* rate of poverty is. A number of cross-national studies have found a positive correlation between inequality and violent crime.⁴² Countries such as the United States, South Africa, and Brazil—all with high income inequality—tend to have higher violent crime rates than other countries with comparable or lower per-capita incomes, but greater equality. Although Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Laos suffer from extensive and acute poverty, they also have low income inequality when compared to either affluent or developing countries. And all three have relatively low homicide rates.

African and Latin American cities (largely poor and unequal) tend to suffer from high rates of crime. For example, Colombia and South Africa, with some of the world's most extreme income inequality, have among the world's highest urban homicide and rape rates. Rio de Janeiro is among the world's leaders in robbery and sexual assaults, while Kingston (Jamaica), Kampala (Uganda), and Gaborone (Botswana) also suffer from exceptionally high levels of violent crime. In all of them income and wealth are highly concentrated. Of course, the association between inequality and crime is not absolute. For example, while income is very unequally distributed in Chile, its cities have low levels of violent crime. Similarly, both Hong Kong and Singapore, though they have moderately high income concentration, are among the safest cities in the world. In some of

these exceptional cases, other factors likely influence crime rate. These include cultural values, the strength of nuclear families, and the likelihood of being caught and punished by the criminal justice system. For the most part, however, a country's degree of income equality is a strong predictor of its crime rate.

Many years ago, researchers conducted surveys on crime victimization in cities located in various parts of the world. Rather than accepting official crime statistics, the study asked respondents directly whether they had been a crime victim (of either a violent or nonviolent crime) in the *previous 5 years*. They then calculated the percentage of the urban population that reported being victimized during that period in the major regions of the world. Looking first at the proportion of the urban population that had been victims of violent crimes other than homicide (including rapes, assaults, and muggings), they found that Asia followed by Western Europe had the lowest violent crime rates.* North America had a violent crime rate nearly double Asia's, while Africa and South America had rates at or near triple Asia's. Regional variation was lower when comparisons were made for all crimes (nonviolent as well as violent) but, the rank order remained the same. Asia had the lowest overall crime rate, followed by Western Europe, then North America, South America, and finally Africa.⁴³ Not coincidentally, the regional rankings for crime were fairly similar to their ranking on income inequality.

In addition to normal criminal activity, residents of many cities must deal with "government crime" in the form of corruption or intimidation. In polls conducted in a range of locations, only 0.1 percent of British residents (one in a thousand) and 0.2 percent of Americans responded that they had been asked to pay a bribe to a government official (including police) during that year or expected to be asked to pay one before the end of the year. That proportion increased to 19.5 percent in Kampala (Uganda) and 29.9 percent in Jakarta (Indonesia).⁴⁴

Police shakedowns and solicitation of protection money are common in many LDCs, but in some countries police corruption is far more serious. In Mexico, many national and municipal policeman support major drug cartels and are involved in kidnappings, extortion, and murder. In early 2011, when mass graves containing at least 145 bodies were found not far from the Texas border, 16 local policemen were arrested for links to the brutal Zeta cartel and for involvement in those killings. In Argentina, one sociologist observed:

Each division [of the Buenos Aires police department] dedicates itself to the area of crime that it is supposed to be fighting. The robbery division steals and robs, the narcotics division traffics drugs, auto theft controls the stealing of cars and the chop shops, and those in fraud and bunko, defraud and swindle.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the Argentine public had the lowest level of trust in their police of any of the 26 countries surveyed in the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁶ In

*Since the study was based on interviews of crime victims, obviously it could not include murder victims.

many other developing countries rampant crime and, especially, extensive police corruption not only threaten the security of all city dwellers (regardless of economic status) but undermine the government's legitimacy.

THE POLITICS OF THE URBAN POOR: CONFLICTING IMAGES

How do the urban poor react politically to their daily struggles for jobs, shelter, and personal safety? As with discussions of peasant politics, social scientists have presented sharply contrasting images of the politics of the urban poor. When political scientists and sociologists first noted the flood of Third World migration and urban growth, many viewed the sprawling slums and squatter settlements as potential hotbeds of unrest or revolution. In a highly influential early work on the LDCs, James Coleman warned that "there exist in most urban centers elements predisposed to anomic activity [behavior caused by alienation, often lacking societal or moral constraints]."⁴⁷ Samuel Huntington maintained that the first generation of urban migrants was unlikely to challenge the existing order, but their children often would: "At some point, the slums [and shantytowns] of Rio and Lima are likely to be swept by social violence, as the children of the city demand the rewards of the city."⁴⁸ And economist Barbara Ward, taking note of shantytown poverty and the rise of radical urban movements, insisted that "unchecked, left to grow and fester, there is here enough explosive material to produce . . . bitter class conflict . . . erupting in guerrilla warfare, and threatening, ultimately, the security even of the comfortable West."⁴⁹

As we will see, the urban poor have, indeed, contributed to several recent Third World revolutions. Yet, the urban conflagrations that many analysts had once expected have been rare. For the most part, the poor have shunned radical political activity and violence. Even at the ballot box, they have been as likely to vote for right-wing or centrist political candidates as for radicals. It now seems clear that initial expectations of a violent or radicalized urban lower class were based on erroneous premises. Many social scientists had assumed that urban migrants, coming to the cities with raised expectations and heightened political sensitivities, would surely turn militant when those expectations were not satisfied. Instead, although the slums of Cairo, Calcutta, and Caracas may appear horrendous to outside observers, most migrants find them preferable to their previous life in the countryside. For example, the urban poor are far more likely than their rural counterparts to have access to electricity, sewage, tap water, and nearby schools. In many countries, urban migration provides an escape from semifeudal social controls or ethnic civil war. Small wonder that surveys of migrants to Ankara, Baghdad, Bogotá, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, and other cities have indicated that most respondents feel better off in their urban hovels than they had in their rural villages.⁵⁰ Periodic economic downturns, including the present crisis, have lowered urban living standards for a while and have undoubtedly embittered some of the

poor. Yet surveys over the years have shown that urbanites generally remain optimistic about the future, particularly their children's future.

When early expectations of urban radicalism and political violence generally failed to materialize, some scholars jumped to the opposite conclusion. For example, based on his studies of low-income neighborhoods in Mexico and Puerto Rico, anthropologist Oscar Lewis concluded that most of the urban poor are prisoners of a "culture of poverty." By that he referred to an underclass that lacks class consciousness, economic and political organization, and long-term aspirations. While distrustful of government, they feel powerless and fatalistic about effecting change. The culture of poverty, Lewis argued, is inherently apolitical and, hence, quite unlikely to generate radical activity or, for that matter, great pressure for any change.

Related scholarship describes the urban poor as marginal—outside the mainstream of their nation's political and economic life. This suggests a vicious cycle in which the exclusion of the poor magnifies their political apathy, which, in turn, isolates them further. They demonstrate a "lack of active participation due to the fact that . . . marginal groups make no decisions; they do not contribute to the molding of society."⁵¹ Like the victims of Lewis's culture of poverty, marginals allegedly show little class consciousness or capacity for long-term collective action.

While it may be true that many poor city dwellers feel incapable of advancing their own lives or influencing the political system—often with good reason—they do not necessarily suffer from the apathy or helplessness that many scholars ascribed to them. Levels of fatalism or optimism vary from place to place and from time to time, depending on both the community's cultural values and its socioeconomic experiences. When poor slum dwellers in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya—low-income African countries—were asked whether they believed that "when a person is born, the success he/she is going to have is already decided" (an obvious measure of fatalism), nearly 60 percent of them strongly agreed and an additional 11 percent agreed somewhat. In Brazil, a much more economically developed country with one of the world's most unequal income distributions, only about 15 percent strongly agreed, but some 30 percent agreed somewhat. Finally, in Chile, which since the start of the 1990s has experienced the most rapid economic growth in Latin America, with a sharp decline in urban poverty, a mere 4 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, while only 15 percent agreed somewhat.⁵² In short, the level of fatalism or optimism among the urban poor varies considerably across nations and seems to correspond more to objective economic conditions than to culturally embedded values.

Just as initial predictions of radicalism and political violence among the urban lower class have turned out to be greatly exaggerated, so too have the reverse assertions that the poor are invariably apathetic and fatalistic. To be sure, low-income communities generally are not highly politicized. In his study of the poor in Guatemala City, Bryan R. Roberts found that "they claim to avoid politics in their local work, and to them the term *politician* is synonymous with deceit and corruption."⁵³ Yet those assessments do not originate in the slum dwellers' innate apathy or fatalism. Rather, they come from the realistically

"perceived impracticality of [the urban poor] changing the existing order" and, in countries such as Guatemala at that time, from living in a repressive political system.⁵⁴ On the other hand, when given the opportunity to organize (i.e., when their political activity is not repressed) and when there is a realistic chance of attaining some benefits from the political system, many low-income communities have seized the opportunity. The slums and shantytowns of Caracas, Lima, and Rio, for example, have spawned numerous well-organized and politically effective community groups. Furthermore, their leaders often have a keen understanding of how to operate within the political system and manipulate it.

In time, many social scientists questioned the concepts of marginality and the culture of poverty. In the previously mentioned survey of poor neighborhoods in four African cities (in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya) and four Latin American cities (in Brazil and Chile), political attitudes, levels of political interest, and political knowledge varied considerably. In all four countries, a majority of the people (ranging from 51 to 63 percent) surveyed responded that they were *not* interested in politics.⁵⁵

Yet, despite their professed disinterest, many of these slum dwellers were well informed and communicative about politics. In Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya roughly half of them reported talking occasionally with other people "about the problems which [their] country has to face today." That proportion rose to almost two-thirds in Brazil. Moreover, although over half of them professed to have no interest in politics, about half of those surveyed in Chile and Côte d'Ivoire claimed that they regularly followed political news. When asked to name important government leaders, most were quite knowledgeable. In all four nations, at least two-thirds were able to name the president of their country (reaching 94 percent in Kenya and 96 percent in Chile). Moreover, about half the respondents in Chile and Kenya, and two-thirds in Brazil and Côte d'Ivoire could name the mayor of their town. Most impressively, more than 70 percent of these poor Kenyans and Ivorians could name the president of at least one *other* African country, while almost half the Chileans could name the president of another Latin American country (Brazilians were less knowledgeable). One suspects that these figures exceed the percentage of Americans who can name the president of Mexico or the prime minister of Canada. In short, these low-income city dwellers seemed to have a greater interest in politics than they were willing to admit. Perhaps the question on their level of political interest meant something different to them than it did to the people conducting the survey.

Unfortunately, however, in all four countries the urban poor tended to take a rather dim view of their political system and their elected representatives. More than 80 percent of those surveyed in each of the four countries believed that "those we elect to parliament lose touch with people pretty quickly," with that number reaching 94 percent in Chile. When asked whether they believed that "public officials care what people like me think," a significant majority in all of the eight cities said "no." Surprisingly, Ivorians, living in a country that was not then democratic, were most positive about their public officials. On the other hand, Chileans, who live in the most democratic and politically responsive of the four nations, were least likely by far to believe that

their government officials care about them and were also least likely to believe that their parliamentary representative keeps in touch with low-income constituents. Perhaps Chileans had harbored unrealistically high expectations of their new political leaders following the restoration of democracy in 1990 after a 17-year military dictatorship. Another important factor may be that Chilean parties, renowned for their strong linkages to the lower classes prior to the dictatorship, had become elitist and distant during their years in exile.

Thus, there seems to be a wide variety of political attitudes among the urban poor. Moreover, their attitudes may vary over time in response to changes in national politics. Although the slums of Santiago in 1973 or Tehran (Iran) in 1979 boiled with unrest, the same neighborhoods were largely tranquil or even passive years later. Clearly, a more nuanced view of Third World urban politics requires us to ask: Under what circumstances do the poor organize politically? What goals do they seek, and how do they pursue them? What factors determine whether their political organization is peaceful or violent, conservative or radical, reformist or revolutionary?

FORMS OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION AMONG THE URBAN POOR

Political scientists have long understood that the urban poor tend to be better informed and more politically active than their rural counterparts. Indeed, early scholarship on the Third World used a nation's level of urbanization as an indirect indicator of its level of political participation. Lower-income city residents have higher levels of literacy than peasants do, greater exposure to the mass media, and more contact with political campaigns and rallies. This does not mean, however, that most of them are highly politicized. To the contrary, as we have noted, many of them are indifferent, apathetic, or fatalistic about political events (just as many Americans are). Nor does it mean that political activists in the community are necessarily radical or indignant about local living conditions or prone to violent protest. What it does mean is that the urban poor generally vote in higher numbers and follow politics more closely than the peasantry does. Furthermore, it appears that many low-income neighborhoods carefully calculate what benefits they can secure from the political system and then organize to secure them. Contrary to initial expectations that the disoriented and frustrated urban poor would riot and rebel, they have tended, instead, to be rather pragmatic and careful in their political behavior.

Individual Political Behavior

For most slum and shantytown dwellers, opportunities for individual political activity are rather restricted. Until recently, voting had a limited political impact in most developing nations. Despite the impressive spread of Third World democracy during the past decades, most countries in Africa and the Middle East, and many in Asia, are still dominated by a single party or leader

who controls the election results (e.g., the most recent presidential elections in Iran and Afghanistan). And even in electoral democracies, where many candidates court the support of the urban poor, they tend to forget those voters until the next election.

An alternative, often more fruitful, type of individual political activity takes the form of clientelism (patron-client relationships). Members of the urban lower class often advance their interests by attaching themselves to a prominent patron within the government, an influential political party, or an organized political movement. Clientelism involves "the dispensing of public resources as favors by political power holders/seekers . . . in exchange for votes or other forms of popular support." While it does offer concrete advantages to the less-powerful partner (i.e., the client), it is at its heart "a strategy of elite-controlled political participation fostering the status quo."⁵⁶ Potentially frustrated or radicalized individuals and groups are thereby co-opted into the political system with the lure of immediate, though limited, gains.

Of course, patron-client relations were also common tools of America's urban political bosses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Big-city political machines aided recently arrived immigrants by supplying jobs, access to local government authorities, and Christmas turkeys in exchange for their support at the polls. Today, in cities throughout the Third World, the poor use clientelistic relations to secure credit, government employment, and other economic goods. Dictators such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko and Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza maintained their regimes for years by dispensing patronage. Similarly, in electoral democracies, such as India, Uruguay, and the Philippines, political bosses garner votes and volunteers in similar ways.

For most of the urban poor, however, collective rather than individual activity appears to be the most productive form of political participation. Many low-income neighborhoods have organized rather effectively to extract government benefits. Often, one of their first goals is to secure land titles for their homes along with basic services such as sanitation, sewage, tap water, schools, and paved streets.

Collective Goals: Housing and Urban Services

On the outskirts of Lima, Peru, several million people live in squatter communities. For the most part, these settlements were started through organized invasions of unoccupied land—be it government property, church property, or land whose ownership had been in dispute:

Some invasions involve relatively small groups of families who cooperate on an informal basis shortly before the occupation of the land. Others involve hundreds of families and are planned with great care. The leaders of these invasions often organize well before the invasion occurs and meet many times to recruit members, choose a site, and plan the occupation itself.⁵⁷

Although these land seizures were illegal, one study found that nearly half of the earliest ones were carried out with either the explicit or tacit approval of

local government officials. While the authorities did not want invasions to get out of hand, they understood that permitting a controlled number of them onto low-value land (much of it public) enabled the poor to build their own homes with little cost to the state. There were political benefits to be gained as well. By protecting the invaders from police eviction, a political leader or party could secure electoral support from that community. In many cases, squatters paid off local authorities prior to their invasions.

When a leftist military regime seized power in Peru, it was anxious to mobilize the urban poor but, at the same time, it also wanted to preempt independent political activity. The generals issued an urban reform law legalizing most of the existing squatter communities. They tried to mobilize, yet control, the poor through SINAMOS, a state-run political organization for the rural and urban masses. Henry Dietz's study of six poor neighborhoods in Lima reveals that community leaders in several locations were adept at switching their tactics from Peru's earlier competitive electoral politics to the new rules of enlightened authoritarianism.⁵⁸ Mobilized neighborhoods used an impressive array of tactics to secure assistance from the military regime. These included: working through SINAMOS, enlisting the aid of a sympathetic Catholic bishop whom the church had assigned to the shantytowns, gaining the support of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), publishing letters in major newspapers, pressuring local government bureaucrats, and directly petitioning the president.

Although Lima's squatter settlements have been unusually well organized, the urban poor in many other developing countries have also established useful ties between their neighborhoods and the state. For example, in her study of low-income neighborhoods in Mexico City, Susan Eckstein described how neighborhood leaders became active in the long-ruling political party at the time (the PRI), thereby establishing themselves as the links between the government and their communities. Because these community organizations were controlled from the top down and tended to be short-lived, Eckstein was skeptical about how much the poor really gained through this clientelistic system. Still, she conceded that, over the years, poor neighborhoods had successfully petitioned the government for such benefits as running water, electricity, local food markets, schools, and better public transportation. Following the PRI's defeat in the 2000 presidential election (after 71 years in power) and Mexico's transition to democracy, many low-income neighborhoods have been forced to establish new clientelistic relationships.

The politics of low-income neighborhoods throughout the Third World generally resemble the Peruvian and Mexican models in two important respects: the scope of their claims and their relationship to the national political system. Studies of politics in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and other LDCs demonstrate that the poor usually have limited and pragmatic demands. For example, when their demands focus on housing, as they often do, they may simply demand protection against eviction from their illegal settlements. Beyond that, they may ask for basic services (water, electricity, etc.) and titles to their plots so that they can build their own homes. Established neighborhoods often request a medical clinic, a market, or a preschool lunch program.

None of these objectives presents a challenge to the established political system or a call for major redistribution of economic resources.

In fact, the very nature of their political organizations limits the demands of low-income communities since those groups tend to atrophy after a number of years. Consequently, as Alan Gilbert and Peter Ward charge, "The [the government's] main aim [in supporting] community-action programs is less to improve conditions for the poor . . . than to legitimate the state . . . to help maintain existing power relations in society."⁵⁹ As an alternative to clientelism, critics favor a more independent, and perhaps more radical, form of mobilization that would raise the urban poor's political consciousness and lead to more sweeping redistributive policies benefiting far more people.

Other analysts, however, hold a more positive view of clientelism. While recognizing its shortcomings, they insist that the benefits that it brings are clearly better than nothing. Viewed in the broader context of society's tremendous inequalities, paved streets, clean drinking water, or a clinic may not seem like sufficient improvements to some outside observers. Nevertheless, the low-income neighborhoods that receive them appreciate their value. A radical regime might redistribute more to the poor, but, that usually is not a viable option. Furthermore, the performance of Third World radical regimes in helping the poor has been mixed. Marxist governments often redistribute significant resources to the urban poor soon after taking power. However, with the notable exception of China (after it transformed to an essentially capitalist economy), they have usually had a poor record of generating economic growth.

The benefits of clientelism vary from country to country, depending on the nature of the political system and the health of the economy. In relatively open and democratic systems, the poor have broader opportunities to organize, demonstrate, petition, and vote. Consequently, their capacity to *demand* rewards from the state is normally greater than under authoritarian regimes. At the same time, the level of benefits clientelistic systems can allocate to low-income neighborhoods is also constrained by the state's economic resources. During their petroleum booms, the Mexican and Venezuelan governments could be more generous to the urban poor. Even in more difficult economic times, the Mexican government used revenues from the sale of state enterprises to finance public works projects in the urban slums. When Venezuela reaped the rewards of its petroleum wealth, President Hugo Chávez financed extensive antipoverty programs, which earned him strong support among the urban poor. On the other hand, the remaining dictatorships in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Zimbabwe, have neither the economic resources nor the political will to aid impoverished urban neighborhoods.

Whatever the merits or limits of clientelism, its scope and range refute certain earlier assumptions about the politics of the urban poor. On the one hand, their often delicate and complex patron-client negotiations demonstrate that numerous low-income neighborhood leaders are more politically skilled than many outside analysts had given them credit for. While many of the urban poor suffer from fatalism and excessive individualism, others are capable of sophisticated political organization and tough bargaining with the state or political parties. On the other hand, the universality of clientelism indicates

that poor rarely engage in the radical politics, violent upheavals, or revolutionary activities that other political scientists had expected. During the recent global economic crisis and in regional economic meltdowns in the 1980s and 1990s, various urban neighborhoods have erupted in violence. Nevertheless, the extent of rioting and social unrest has remained surprisingly limited. To be sure, unemployment and other economic difficulties helped motivate the slum dwellers of Tunis and Cairo to join in the mass protests that recently brought down the dictators of Egypt and Tunisia. But both those prodemocratic uprisings were started and led by young people out of the middle class.

Radical Political Behavior

While most of the Third World's urban poor favor moderate and pragmatic forms of political expression, there have been important exceptions. In some countries, such as Chile in the early 1970s, Peru in the 1980s, and El Salvador since the mid-1990s, low-income neighborhoods have voted in substantial numbers for Marxist political candidates. And, in a few cases, residents of urban slums and shantytowns have been important players in revolutionary upheavals. In 1970, Salvador Allende, candidate of Chile's leftist Popular Unity (UP) coalition, became the developing world's first democratically elected Marxist president. Allende received considerable electoral support from the *campamentos* (squatter settlements) that ring the capital city of Santiago. In fact, a number of *campamentos* were politically organized either by the UP or by the MIR (Revolutionary Left Movement), a more radical group than UP, which periodically engaged in armed action. In 1983, the poor of Lima played a major role in electing a Marxist mayor, Alfonso Barrantes. These examples, as well as the Communist Party's electoral successes in several large Indian cities, indicate that the poor do support radical political parties under certain circumstances. However, they will favor those parties only if they have a realistic chance of winning at the local or national level so that they can be in a position to deliver tangible benefits to their supporters. Thus, even a slum dweller's decision to vote for a radical candidate is often based on very pragmatic calculations. Not long after supporting Barrantes for mayor, Lima's poor gave him few votes when he ran for the nation's presidency, believing that his Marxist policies might succeed in Lima but were not viable at the national level.

More often, the urban poor are attracted to charismatic populists (such as Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez) or to moderate leftists (such as Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva). Squatters or slum dwellers are much less likely to embrace urban guerrillas or other revolutionary movements. Teodoro Petkoff, a former leader of the Venezuelan communists' urban guerrilla wing, noted that residents of Caracas's poor barrios, even those who belonged to leftist unions, rejected the guerrillas. Blue-collar workers often elected communist union representatives in those days, Petkoff observed, because they felt that those union militants would deliver more at the bargaining table. On the other hand, in national elections, the urban poor were more likely to vote for the two mainstream parties (Social Democrats and Christian Democrats) or

the country's former right-wing dictator, all of whom were more capable of quickly delivering rewards to their supporters than the guerrillas were.⁶⁰

In the 1980s and 1990s, Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) guerrillas had some success in the shantytowns of Lima. However, as often as not they only earned that "support" through intimidation. For example, when a popular, women's political organizer in the large shantytown Villa El Salvador failed to cooperate with it, the guerrilla group assassinated her in front of her family and neighbors.

This is not to suggest that the urban poor never support revolutions. Josef Gugler notes that during the second half of the twentieth century, the cities played a central role in four of the Third World's revolutions—in Bolivia, Cuba, Iran, and Nicaragua.⁶¹ However, in most cases, other social classes took the lead: miners, unionized blue-collar workers, artisans, the lower middle class, and the national police in Bolivia; students and university graduates in Cuba; and theology students and petroleum workers in Iran. In contrast, Douglas Butterworth's study of the former inhabitants of a Havana slum, *Las Yaguas*, conducted almost 20 years after the revolutionary victory, found that most respondents were barely aware of Fidel Castro's existence during his rise to power.⁶²

In the past years, many of the urban poor in Muslim countries have been attracted to a different type of revolutionary vision, Islamism and Islamist extremism. In Tunisia and Egypt, Islamist organizations played a secondary role in the mass protests of the Arab Spring. However, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia's Ennahdha (Renaissance) Party, both avowedly moderate Islamist parties, have each become their country's most popular party. It is too early to tell what role each may play in their nation's future politics or what influence Islamist movements may have in Syria if that revolution succeeds.

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE RURAL AND URBAN POOR IN DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

In future decades the Third World will continue to experience a shift in population from its rural areas to its urban centers. While the *rate* of urbanization has slowed in parts of the Third World, *absolute increases* in urban populations (the increases in raw numbers) will be greater than ever in the coming decades (Tables 6.3 and 6.4). Thus, governments will have to heed urban needs, including those of the poor. Still, even with the best-intentioned public policies, developing economies will be hard-pressed to provide sufficient jobs, housing, sanitation, and social services. Various economic crises over the past two to three decades have made the task all the more difficult. Urban crime, pollution, and AIDS will add tremendously to the burdens on the political and economic systems. In countries such as South Africa, Guatemala, and Iraq, the fall of authoritarian regimes has led to a surge in crime. To the extent that rural-urban migration can be slowed by agrarian reform, rural development programs, and improved rural education and health care, it will give both urban planners and the urban poor more time and opportunity to deal with these problems.

As the Third World countries try to consolidate their new democracies (including, hopefully, the countries of North Africa and the Middle East involved in the Arab Spring), they will find the urban poor better equipped than their rural counterparts to become participatory citizens. But they are also more volatile and, should democratic governments disappoint them, they are more likely to turn to Islamist radicalism or other forms of antisystemic behavior. Both the rural and urban poor will need to refine and improve their strategies for securing state resources, while governments will have to become more responsive to both groups' needs. In many developing countries, however, urban crime and drug usage are more likely than radical politics to threaten stability in the proximate future. Faced with rising crime rates and economic deprivation, the poor may become disillusioned with democracy. If the military and the middle class also fear rising crime and disorder, governments may become more repressive.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Peasants were the major foot-soldiers in most twentieth-century revolutions (China, Cuba, Mexico, and Vietnam). Is that likely to be true of twenty-first-century revolutions in the developing world? Why or why not?
2. What kind of rural reform or development projects do you think would most benefit the rural poor? Why?
3. Although Third World agrarian reform programs have fallen out of favor in contemporary government policies, there are those who still argue for their value. What are some arguments for restarting agrarian reform in the developing world?
4. Discuss the political orientations of the urban poor. What does survey research tell us about the way that the urban poor look at their present circumstances and their views on prospects of improving them?
5. Discuss the growth of urban crime in the Third World, the major obstacles to reducing crime, and the possible political consequences of rising crime rates.
6. How might rapid urban growth contribute to the growth of democratic government in the LDCs? Under what circumstances might it *undermine* democracy?

NOTES

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4. Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 10.
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Revolutionary Change



While Marxist and other radical revolutions took place in many LDCs in the twentieth century, Cuba is now one of the last fully communist regimes in the Third World. Here Fidel Castro and other leaders of the revolutionary army are shown triumphantly entering Havana after their victory over Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in 1959.

Source: AFP/Newscom.