

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

EL SALVADOR: Violence Impedes Agrarian Reform.

The murder of Salvadoran peasant leader Rodolfo Viera this week makes prompt implementation of the government's agrarian reform program more urgent, but, at the same time, it will reduce the political benefits of the program for the junta. [REDACTED]

The death of Viera will have little immediate political impact on the violence-weary public. It will, however, have a serious effect on the still-evolving agrarian reform program in which Viera played a major role. [REDACTED]

Viera's criticism of the delays in introducing reforms and of military brutality had made his dismissal as director of the program a near certainty. Most of his followers will blame rightists allied with the government for his death. [REDACTED]

Viera headed a 150,000-member peasant union, which provided the only organized--if still conditional--popular support enjoyed by the government. Perhaps one-fourth of that membership maintains contacts with the far left, and it is now more susceptible to recruitment. Other disheartened members may simply quit--Viera was one of the few surviving center-left leaders, and his replacement is unlikely to have his appeal or credibility. [REDACTED]

The government hopes to issue the long-promised titles quickly to tenants and sharecroppers under the "land to the tiller" program, but there may be new delays. In the meantime, the original owners--themselves largely lower middle class or peasant farmers--have not yet received any compensation. [REDACTED]

Although agrarian reform is the government's most important program, the hatred and violence that divide El Salvador inhibit further progress. The government, for example, has quietly shelved a separate program expropriating medium-sized properties in order to avoid further undermining the rural economy, but it has issued no official notice of this for fear of strong criticism. Without such an announcement, however, owners will not invest but instead work against the regime. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Approved for Release

NOV 1993