

# The similarities and differences of civil wars in el salvador and guatemala



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This paper is designed to focus our attention on the similarities and differences of civil wars in places like El Salvador and Guatemala in Central America. Here, we will discover and underline significant points that will give us a clear picture of what makes these two brutal conflicts very similar to each other. We will discuss the period of time when these two big events started in each country separately. Also, we will try to find the main causes of those conflicts and their mission and goals from the government and its opposition sides. Additionally, we will try to understand the strategy of defeating the insurgency by the government forces of El Salvador and Guatemala and the rebellions' tactics against the government by bringing examples. At the end of this paper, we will observe the consequences that were left during and after that terrible time. And finally, we will talk about the peace agreements that were the necessary step for the government to stop that disaster that took away a huge amount of civilian lives.

Let start our discussion with the time when these two civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala began. Also, we will try to explain who were fighting against. El Salvador is one of the smallest and densely populated countries in Central America. Unfortunately, from 1979 to 1991 El Salvador “ the face of the revolution” was involved in the civil war that lasted around 12 years of extreme violence. The Salvadoran Civil War was between the Salvadoran oligarchy in alliance with the military government of El Salvador and the US that formed “ the Rapid Deployment Infantry Battalions” (note: many other countries allied with the US by helping military government in Chile provide essential training and tactical advice to the Salvadoran Forces) against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (the FMLN was the insurgent group

that became a legal political at the end of the country's civil war in 1992) that was one of the major political parties in El Salvador that was formed from guerilla groups, workers, communists, and socialists. The FMLN participants were ranged from children to elderly, male and female that were trained in FMLN camps in the mountains and jungles. The United States was contributed to that conflict by providing the El Salvador military with significant financial assistance by making herself as the genuine participant during that conflict. Moreover, there was the time when US officers were making critical decisions by running that war in the top level positions of the Salvadoran military. Based on some resources the El Salvadorian movement had some support from urban intellectuals, writers, journalists, professionals, and union members.

Compare to Guatemalan Civil War we can see that the beginning was on November 13th, 1960 and it ended on December 29th, 1996. This war was also between the government of Guatemala with the help from the US (that were establishing its hegemony over resources and labor in Latin American nations), Israel and South Africa against " Left-wing Politics". The Guatemalan military and police were working closely with the US agency during this war by giving us a clear picture of how the US was involved in these two conflicts. The State Department by securing the US was in the big interests of getting resources and land from Guatemala. With the monetary support from the US advisers, the Guatemalan government was able to establish a Presidential Intelligence Agency in the National Palace. The 39% of Guatemala's weapons were imported from Israel. Approximately 300 Israeli advisors were operating directly with Guatemala forces. South Africa

also provided Guatemalan military with the advisers, training tactics, and material support. The Left-wing Politics were supporting and fighting for the idea of social equality and egalitarianism that also gives us the similarity of these two civil wars. They were against of the social hierarchy. Most of the time, the “ leftist rebel groups” and their ideas were supported by Maya indigenous people and Ladino peasants. As in the movement in El Salvador, the movement in Guatemalan Civil War also had some support from urban middle-class intellectuals, junior army officers, and professionals. Some of the urban intellectuals were part of MR-13. Another part was in the insurgent movement that called itself as the ORPA (Revolutionary Organization of Armed People).

The main reasons for those conflicts and defeating tactics against each other. The main reason for the El Salvadoran Civil War was the failure of the government to improve living standards in the country. Also, the reasons why the civil war in El Salvador could not end sooner it is because the government did not want to found a democratic regime, which included the legalization of the FMLN as a political party, civilian control of state security forces, and electoral reform, according to Elisabeth Wood’s article. The main goals of using violent tactics against insurgents for the Salvadoran army and security forces of the United States in 1979 was to prevent a takeover by the FMLN (leftist-led guerrillas and their allied political organizations).

Salvadoran army was warned that rebels were limited with military resources and their biggest tactic was laid on “ mass organization” that was made up from the students, labor unions, and of course the peasant organizations that could mobilize their power in many cities within El Salvador country that

would make able to shut down the whole country via strikes. Many insurgents and peasants jointed FMLN to fight the government military for material gain and benefits. The reason for many civilians to fight the military was “ piety” according to some resources. People saw their participation in that war as the way of advancing the personal cause and a communal feeling of godly justice. Insurgents believed in social changes that were reflected in the lack of political, economic and social opportunities toward them during that time. Moreover, insurgent saw their reason of joining the FMLN as the opposition to the powerful elite’s that were treated peasant communities not equally on the everyday basis and the government’s oppressors by hoping to gain respect for their fundamental human rights.

Compare to Guatemala’s reason we can see a clear similarity where insurgences “ the Poor of Guatemala” rebelled against the government oppression and human rights violation. According to some resources the US was involved in the cause of this conflict by helping Carlos Manuel Arana Osorio to become the first military dictator who was representing the Institutional Democratic Party. Guatemala’s military leaders during this conflict were developing tactics with the US assistance for the massive counter-insurgency campaign that left thousands of people as missing. Moreover, the US adopted the tactic of four-decade-long terror and repression to help Guatemala government to stay in power. Intelligence agencies including CIA were focusing on providing direct and indirect support to state operations. Guatemala forces were assisting the US by helping to create a secret military training base on the territory of Guatemala. During the civil war, the Guatemalan military was able to spread its power over the

whole country for many years thereby eliminating enemies in all socio-political institutions and Guatemala's national life control that forced people to fight back. Also, the Guatemalan military was running the counterinsurgency programs autonomously from the Presidential House. In all places around Guatemala, people were put in danger by the government forces that were targeting each character that was suspected of leftist sympathies. The Guerrilla Army of the Poor was part of the tactics of establishing a " social justice: against the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the judicial and administrative State institutions. For the many years, the insurgency was highly inactive. They were defeated and demoralized almost on all fronts. Their tactics were revised few times where it was targeting civilians and where it members of the security forces. As we can see already the US was part of both these civil wars. Nevertheless, Guatemalan military received more U. S. assistance that was including the help from Israel and South Africa compare to El Salvadorian one.

The strategy that was used during these conflicts: Based on the valid researches the Salvadoran Armed Forces were using the strategy of defeating the FMLN that were very similar that were used by counterinsurgency in Guatemala. This strategy of defeating FMLN was adapted from the US that was used during the Vietnam War and taught by American military advisors. The main idea of that strategy was laid on eliminating the insurgency by destroying its support base in the countryside. The main target was the civilian population that was killed in the purpose of removing any possible bases of support for building knew rebels organizations. The code name of one of the strategies against FMLN was "

draining the sea” where the guerrilla was moving between the people as the fish swims in the sea. There were used different other strategies. One of them was “ sweep” operation that was based on killings of anyone captured by the army. During this war, some involved strategies came directly from the US government by providing the Salvador military with the “ Atlacatl soldiers” that were trained and controlled by the US during that conflict. If we consider another side of this conflict then we will be able to see the strategy from the FMLN was based on the considerable support in the countryside by forced recruitment of young men into rebel groups. Despite everything, in the FMLN’s strategy also was the place for the violence against civilians that were generally planned to target the El Salvadoran government. The FMLN was killing mayors who cooperated with the Salvadoran military and other officials. The FMLN was trying to use the strategy of focusing their attention on destroying bridges, cutting power lines, damaging coffee plantations. They were doing everything to damage the economy that supported the government. Moreover, during the war, the FMLN adopted imported arms that helped them to become more strategic and better planned.

Compare to Guatemala case we can see that the government forces of Guatemala were using the strategy of defeating the rebellions that were based on genocide the Maya population and the brutal violations of human rights against civilians. During the Guatemalan Civil War, there were used numerous strategies that were based not just on focusing on targeting the individual rebellion groups but the slaughtering of the peasantry and massacres of entire villages. In 1980 military’s strategy of deafening

rebellions were considered on the level of genocide that was defined by the huge amount of the killed and disappeared people that were approximately 200, 000. The US Central Intelligence Agency was using B-26 bombers that were presented as Guatemalan military jets to help the Guatemalan military to bomb the rebel bases. According to some substantial evidence, the US military advisors were involved in the formation of death squads as well that took away countless civilian lives. Because of these actions from the Guatemalan government forces, the rebels were forced to change their strategy by occupying the hills of eastern Guatemala and Honduras in the case of restoring the kernel of its force that later was named as “ MR-13”. During this war, MR-13 were targeting the offices of the United Fruit Company that were controlled by the American corporation. Also, MR-13 was able to establish the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) in helping with Guatemalan Labor Party, middle-class intellectuals and students in the case to control the rebalance in different places of the country. Compare to El Salvadorian “ Atlacatl soldiers”, Guatemala’s military also had the special operations wing of the Armed Forces of Guatemala that was called as Kaibiles and were trained internationally. It was one of the worlds’ toughest, best trained and most ruthless commando forces. This operation wing has consisted with 85 % of Guatemalan soldiers and 15 % of the US and others countries. The Guatemalan Armed Forces were using the counterinsurgency “ sweeping” strategy as it was used in El Salvador against MR-13 that had the code-name “ Operation Falcon” that was conducted with support from the US military assistance as well. The US government and US-based multinationals were taking the strategy of exerting strong pressures to maintain the country’s archaic and unjust socio-economic structures.

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The consequences during the war: The Civil War In EL Salvador caused a huge amount of deaths and migration of its population to different places. This war violated the human rights in many aspects that were included in terrorizing and targeting of civilians by “ death squads” ( an armed group that was designed to kill or makes people disappear for the political, ethical purposes). This war was using the recruitment of child soldiers by the military that violated the idea of human rights. There is not an exact amount of people that were killed and disappeared during that conflict but based on some reports the war took away more than 75000 human’s lives. During that conflict around 5% of the civilians’ murder were committed by FMLN guerrillas and around 85% death of (peasants, teachers, students, journalists, and other civilians) were laid on Salvadoran Army, death squads, and three main security forces (National Guard, National Police and Treasury Policy). All groups of citizens that were planning to help or provide any other support to FMLN were put on the risk of death that caused the expanded violence toward all citizens from the military side. Additionally, Salvadoran military promoted the idea where nobody could “ question official policy” or otherwise that person will be put on the stage of the life risk. During this war, the FMLN was taking over the control of many poor neighborhoods thereby causing them inevitable death by forcing the military to bomb those positions. The FMLN was able to attack and destroy Air Force Base in San Salvador by causing the damage to the economic infrastructure for many millions of dollars. By the end of the war, the Commission of the Truth for El Salvador registered around 22000 complaints toward political violence during that war where 85% were referred to the Salvadoran Army and security forces. Throughout this conflict between government, paramilitary

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forces and the FMLN there were produced the human rights violations, that was the subject of torturing, mutilation, forced disappearance, killing, and mass rape. Most of the kills were made from massacres, executions, landmines and mass bombing. The widespread violence forced over one-sixth of the whole El Salvador population to flee to different countries.

According to some reports around 400000 of refugee was fled to the US.

Compare to Guatemala we can see that during the civil war, the Guatemalan military intelligence services and intelligence organizations were responsible for massive killings and disappearances of most opponents within the states. The state of Guatemala was one of the first in Latin America who used the force disappearances against its opposition that took away approximately 40000 to 50000 lives during the beginning this struggle. According to some sources, the Guatemala military, police and intelligence services were responsible for 93% of the human right abuses where around 3% were committed by the guerrillas. In help with the military intelligence and Judicial Policy, there were the waves of unexplained " disappearances" and killings in Guatemala City and other places of the countryside. Many students were assassinated by the " death-squad". During this conflict, the Guatemalan Army formed the " Special Commando Unit of the Guatemalan Army" that carried out abductions, bombing, street assassinations, torture, and total executions of the real and suspected communists. According to Human rights sources during this conflict 5, 000 Guatemalans were killed by the government for " political reasons" thereby making Guatemala one of the worst human rights violator after El Salvador. By the end of the war, the estimated amount of killed and disappeared people were around 200, 000.

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Most of those kills were the official-sanctioned terror by government forces. Under the "beans or bullets" strategy several hundred Indian villages were obliterated and their inhabitants, presumed to be guerrilla sympathizers, either killed or forced into exile. Hence, in Guatemala military's strategy of deafening rebellions were considered on the level of genocide that was defined by the huge amount of the killed and disappeared people compare to El Salvadorian one where the number of innocent killed people were much less and were not depended on the group, religions, political, and race-ethnicity. One of the main reason why the Guatemalan war last much longer compare to El Salvadorian one was that the United States was the one who was helping to start that war but was less interesting in bringing it to the end.

The end of the civil war: The huge amount of FLMN unsuccessful threats convinced the El Salvador government that the FLMN cannot be defeated totally by using violence. They decided that negotiation for the settlement with the FLMN would be a necessary step toward resolving the existing problem. The first peace settlement was presented by the FMLN in 1982 for creating a Communist dictatorship but was refused by El Salvador's National Federation of Lawyers that claimed that the elections could not be free. Then peace proposal was in 1984, 1985, and 19878 also without effect. The final peace negotiations between El Salvador military and FMLN began in 1990. It was successfully reached only on January 16, 1992, with the final agreement that was reflected in the "Chapultepec Peace Accords" that was signed by the combatants in Mexico City. During the fulfilling of the peace agreements, there were made few changes in the demobilization of Salvadoran military

forces. The Treasury Police and National Guard were annihilated where military intelligence functions were transferred to civilian control.

Compare to Guatemala the peace process was arranged throughout 1994-1996 by the United Nations. The final step was made in March 1995 when the government and the URNG ( the Guatemalan political party that was as the guerrilla movement until 1996 after the peace process in Guatemalan Civil War) signed agreements on human rights, resettlement of displaced persons, historical clarification. and indigenous rights. During that agreement, they also took their attention on the socio-economic and agrarian agreement. One of many reasons why Elizabeth Wood thinks that El Salvadorian peaceful agreement in 1992 was successful is because, in 1994, El Salvador held its first elections. The FMLN was the part of the political parties during that election in the case to ensure that the elections were fair. Compare to Guatemala's result where even after the peace agreement there was the place for profound nor resolved issues. For example, the country still remained significantly divided. Also, the country suffered from violence, weak role of the civilian police force against crime, high levels of inequality, and the Guatemala indigenous pollution was still excluded from the political, economic, and social structures of Guatemala.

Conclusion: based on this paper we can underling the similarities in the strategy of defeating insurgency during the El Salvador and Guatemala civil Wars. Also, we notice that insurgences from El Salvador and Guatemala were having the same cause of fitting the government that was based on egalitarianism and the social changes that were reflected in the lack of political, economic and social opportunities toward the people. Additionally, <https://assignbuster.com/the-similarities-and-differences-of-civil-wars-in-el-salvador-and-guatemala/>

we see that insurgencies in both countries were using the violence against civilians as well. According to Human rights sources during this conflict 5,000 Guatemalans were killed by the government for “ political reasons” thereby making Guatemala one of the worst human rights violator after El Salvador. Both countries were heavily criticized for its unwillingness to investigate or prosecute cases of human rights violations after wars. As we can see from these two conflicts the US government was part of these conflicts on the side of the government by organizing, funding, and equipping them. In both wars, the US advisors were able to involve almost the same counterinsurgency strategies and techniques that were used in Vietnam. Additionally, we can see from this paper that the peace process in both countries was refused a few times by the government before they reached the success.

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