

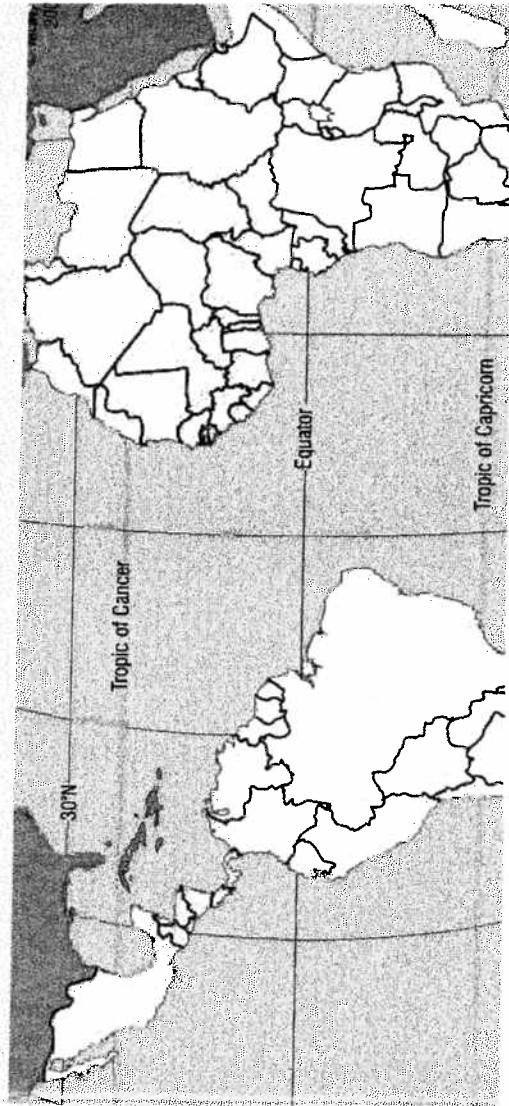
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FROM REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

Cases from Latin America and Africa

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CHAPTER 3

Guatemala: From the Guerrilla Struggle to a Divided Left

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Introduction

The Guatemalan case fits amongst those revolutionary movements, such as its neighbor El Salvador, that were not defeated militarily (at least the guerrillas adamantly assert that they were not but had fought the military to a stalemate) but laid down their arms for the electoral option through negotiated settlements. However, power has eluded the former guerrillas since they first began contesting elections in 1995, and by the last elections, 2005, their movement was in danger of extinction, torn by internal divisions, wracked by leadership problems, and uncertain of its ideological direction.

The Evolution of Armed Struggle from Inception to Strategic Defeat

Revolutionary guerrilla activity began in Guatemala in the early 1960s. The country was the first in Central America to know armed struggle after the Cuban Revolution and the last to see its guerrillas lay down their arms. At the same time, and again different from its neighbors, Guatemala's Communist Party, the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT, Guatemalan Labor Party) was quick to embrace armed struggle as the road

to power, while maintaining its vision of a multifront "revolutionary war" that also encompassed the struggle for democracy and human rights.¹

There are two defining features of the Guatemalan revolutionary Left. One is the role of the country's Communist Party; the other is the Latin American national liberation movements spawned by the Cuban Revolution.² In fact, one can claim that the PGT was the parent (or perhaps grandparent) of all succeeding revolutionary organizations in Guatemala. In some instances, as with the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR, Rebel Armed Forces, founded in 1962 and reorganized after a schism in 1968) and the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP, Guerrilla Army of the Poor, founded in 1972) the relationship was immediate and direct. In other cases, such as the Organización del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA, Organization of the People in Arms, dating from 1979), the ties are more distant and attenuated.

Armed struggle in Guatemala occurred in two cycles. The first was between 1962 and 1967, while the second and longer lasted from 1972 to the middle of the 1980s. In the first cycle, which reached its peak in 1966 and 1967, the FAR succeeded in establishing several guerrilla fronts in the country. In the northeast of the country, between Zacapa and Izabal, the Frente Guerrillero Edgar Ibarra (Edgar Ibarra Guerrilla Front-FGEI) had over 100 guerrillas. The 13 November Revolutionary Movement (MR-13, Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre) operated in Izabal with 30 ill-armed men. In Santa Rosa, located in the southeast of Guatemala, there was a small group called the Regional de Santa Rosa (Santa Rosa Regional Front). The Regional del Occidente (Western Regional Front), which operated in San Marcos and Quetzaltenango, had 30–40 combatants, as did the Southern Regional Front, while there were some 25 in the northern region. About 80 guerrillas operated in Guatemala City, the central region. Overall, there were about 300 combatants, with an additional 5,000 sympathizers and collaborators, most of whom were concentrated in Zacapa and Izabal.³

A year and a half after reaching its highpoint, the first guerrilla movement was effectively dismantled by a wave of unprecedented state terror. Before its collapse, however, the insurgency carried out a number of armed actions⁴ and withstood counterinsurgent sweeps by the army in 1964 and 1965.⁵ But the army's third offensive, which began the day after the death of Luis Turcios Lima, October 3, 1966, and lasted until August 1967, completely dispersed the FAR.⁶

In the second cycle of the insurgency several guerrilla fronts coexisted with the PGT, which in its IV Congress, December 1969, adopted a line

endorsing popular revolutionary war.⁷ Particularly noteworthy in this period was the activity of the EGP, which had emerged in the context of the split between the PGT and the FAR. The EGP waged armed struggle from the jungles of Ixcán to the Cuchumatanes mountains, thence toward the northwestern mountains of El Quiché near Huehuetenango. Later, guerrilla action moved to the northeast with the creation of a front in Alta Verapaz and to the center with the founding of the "paracentral" front. In 1976, the EGP began doing political work with the urban and rural proletariat, semi-proletarian migratory laborers, students, shantytown dwellers, and middle peasants.⁸

At the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, the EGP was the most efficient politico-military front, and the one most feared by the Guatemalan state and its army.⁹ By early 1982 the EGP claimed to have six guerrilla fronts operating. Fighting alongside the EGP were the FAR and the ORPA. The former worked mainly in the country's central region but also succeeded in establishing a stable front in the north, in the Department of El Petén. The ORPA was able to establish itself in several highland zones and the west of Guatemala.

Unlike what happened to the guerrillas in the 1960s, the second wave took root in areas inhabited by poor, indigenous peasants and was accompanied throughout the 1970s by a vigorous urban mass movement. We should note that alongside this urban movement the EGP succeeded in organizing the Peasant Unity Committee (Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC), which brought together peasants and rural laborers. As late as 1980, in the midst of a rising wave of state terror, the CUC was able to organize a significant strike on the agro-export plantations located on Guatemala's coast. Combined, the urban and rural movements provided both the guerrillas' social base and the training ground for future leaders of the insurgency. It was under these conditions that guerrilla activity in Guatemala grew to cover three-quarters of the nation during 1979–1980; and by 1981 the insurgents could realistically foresee expanding to the rest of the country. This phase of rapid expansion coincided with the impetus that the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution and gave the revolutionary hopes of large sectors of society in Guatemala and El Salvador.

When the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union) emerged in February 1982¹⁰ the military was stunned by the dimensions of the revolutionary movement. Reading the memoirs of General Hector Gramajo¹¹ one sees clearly that the Guatemalan army perceived the guerrillas as a serious threat.¹² As it had been in the 1960s, the army's response was a fierce counterinsurgent campaign that unfolded in distinct phases.

The counterinsurgency began in urban areas, focusing on eliminating the leaders and activists of the mass social movement and political parties of the Center and Left (1979–1980). Its objective was to completely destroy the network of social organizations that had been built up during the seventies; thus state terror was selectively applied. This changed with the second phase (1980–1981), which began with a massive wave of terror in the countryside that was directed against the periphery of the insurgency, with the EPG as its principal target.¹³ A third phase started in July 1981, targeting the urban network of the insurgency and ravaging the EPG¹⁴ and the ORPA. The final phase of the counterinsurgency began in the last quarter of 1981. Beginning under the government of General Romeo Lucas García (1981–1982) and reaching its peak during the rule of General Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–1983), this final offensive razed dozens of rural communities in its campaign to exterminate the guerrillas. During its 17 months in power, the government of Ríos Montt murdered more than 16,000 Guatemalans, most of them in rural areas, created over 90,000 refugees, most of whom fled to Mexico, and displaced roughly 1 million people.

The campaigns carried out under the government of Ríos Montt—Operación Victoria (Operation Victory) in 1982 and Firmeza (Strength of Purpose) the following year—had as their mission the occupation and control of communities deemed susceptible to becoming guerrilla bases. Three instruments were developed for this task. One was the Civil Self-Defense Patrols (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil, PACS, later renamed Voluntary Civil Defense Committees), which would become a counterinsurgent force of some 800,000 persons, most of whom were of peasant or indigenous origin.¹⁵ A second tool was the establishment of economic growth poles¹⁶ in zones where guerrillas operated. The final device was a scorched earth policy, which military intelligence saw as a way to “drain the water from the revolutionary fish.”¹⁷

Unlike the 1960s, however, significant parts of the guerrilla organizations survived and were able to launch several offensives in the following years. Further, the URNG did not acknowledge the effects of the counterinsurgency.¹⁸ However, in January and February 1986 they began making overtures toward the recently elected President Cerezo. Then, in November, when the guerrillas suggested the possibility of initiating a dialogue in the interior of the country,¹⁹ it became clear that the chimera of a revolutionary seizure of power had been abandoned. In its place was the more realistic project of a negotiated solution to Guatemala's internal war. In fact, by the end of 1983 the revolutionary project had suffered a strategic defeat.²⁰

The Organizational Logics of the Guerrillas

Guatemalan guerrilla organizations began their political careers carrying out a very specific task (armed struggle), in an equally specific environment (defined by the hostile and repressive Guatemalan Military Regime), and with a common objective (getting the power to carry through the social and political transformations sought by the revolutionary Left of the time). These organizations were highly centralized, vertically structured, and constructed around rigidly defined and hermetically sealed compartments. Nevertheless, each guerrilla formation presented its particular organizational variation on this general theme.

The PGT built its structure around a series of regional bases that covered the principal geographic regions of the country (west, north, central, etc.); the FAR, in whose founding the PGT had participated, used essentially the same organization. The EGP, ORPA, and to some degree the FAR too, used a slightly different geographical base that reflected physical or social regions (plains, highlands, jungle, city) and constructed their organizations around guerrilla fronts that had set up in each zone. At the local level the PGT installed base committees and local committees, whereas the guerrillas formed what they called local irregular forces (FIL) or militias. Relations between the guerrillas and their social bases went through different phases, with each organization having a somewhat different approach. Generally speaking, the PGT, FAC, and EGP sought to maintain close ties with the rural populations in the zones where they had a presence. This was not true of ORPA. After the disastrous effects of the counterinsurgency, it chose to limit the risks it posed to inhabitants of zones where it operated by not organizing villages as publicly declared support bases.

All organizations that engaged in armed struggle (FAR, ORPA, EGP, and PGT) were Marxist-Leninist. Nevertheless, there was still substantial ideological variation among the groups. In the cases of the PGT and FAR, their commitment was explicit. Indeed, at one time the FAR asserted that the PGT was failing to fulfill its duties as Guatemala's Communist Party. The EGP also took Marxism as its doctrinal guide, yet its documents are not as explicitly doctrinaire as those of the FAR or the PGT. As to the ORPA, although its conception of what needed to change in Guatemala was clearly radical, having long been inspired by the Cuban example, it neither defined itself as Marxist nor had “revolutionary” in its name: it was simply the organization of the people in arms. Each of these groups felt it necessary to have a centralized structure, sustained by a highly selective membership (*militancia*) that was completely dedicated to the cause and absolutely sure that its path was correct, much like Panebianco's “believer.”²¹ In all cases, the

structure of organizational power, due to its limited size and extremely hierarchical configuration,²² is characterized by its simplicity: all the resources of organizational power are concentrated in and exercised by the party leadership.

Thus the only difference between the guerrillas (FAR, ORPA, and EGP) and the PGT was that former saw themselves as politico-military fronts, while the later conceived of itself as a party. In the party, this difference revealed itself through the existence of two collegial bodies (the central committee and the politburo), as well as a secretary-general who was *primus inter pares*. In the guerrilla fronts, however, the dominant figure was the commander in chief, even when he was formally supported by a national directorate. The secretary-general was of course derived from Stalinist usage, whereas the commander in chief followed the Cuban model.

In fact, the strong leaders who emerged to guide Central American revolutionary movements during this period effectively amalgamated the two styles. And like their Soviet and Cuban role models, these Central American figures held their positions for life. Though change was not impossible, it took a tremendous upheaval for a secretary-general or commander in chief to lose his post. In Guatemala there are only four instances where this happened. First, in 1954, Jose Manuel Fortuny resigned as secretary-general of the PGT in the midst of the turmoil following the CIA-engineered overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz. Two leaders of the FAR lost their posts. The first incident occurred in 1968 when the group it removed Cesar Montes (Julio Cesar Macias) as its leader. Then in the early 1970s the FAR discharged Comandante Marco Antonio Yon Sosa as its commander when it broke its alliance with the MR-13. The last case occurred in 2001 as an ex-URNNG commander, Pablo Monsanto, led a movement that produced a split that saw the organization's secretary-general resign and move on to reshape the Alianza Nueva Nación (ANN, Alliance for a New Nation).

In the three politico-military organizations the commanders in chief (the URNG's Pablo Monsanto [Jorge Soto], the FAR's Rolando Moran [Ricardo Ramirez], and Gaspar Ilon [Rodrigo Asturias] of ORPA) had a role not held by the Communist Party's secretary-general. Unlike the secretary-general, the guerrilla commander in chief was a charismatic leader and the leader-for-life who personified the organization's history. Besides enjoying moral authority and controlling the levers of organizational power, the commander also had international contacts and prestige. These were sources of political capital that he used within the national revolutionary movement and in his relations with foreign revolutionaries and the international Left more generally.

Guatemalan revolutionaries, like those in El Salvador, were also influenced in their organizational thinking by the 1979 victory of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. The three guerrilla fronts and the PGT faction known as the National Directing Nucleus united to form the URNG in February 1982.²³ Until the moment when the URNG went from being a federation of four groups to begin functioning as a unitary organization, the four component organizations maintained their structural independence and autonomy in military operations. There had been no general staff and military plans agreed to by the Comandancia General (General Command), composed of the military leaders of the four organizations, were carried independently by each of the four allies. It was only as the war continued that there were more instances of coordination among the insurgents.

Besides the General Command, there were also a Commission of the Masses, a Commission of International Work, and, as hostilities wound down and the signing of the peace accords drew closer, there emerged a Political Commission to direct the work of the Frente Democratico Nueva Guatemala (Democratic Front for a New Guatemala) in the 1995 elections. Shortly after the formation of the three original committees, a 44-member Political Council was formed, made up of 11 representatives from each of the 4 constituent organizations. Its function was to elect by secret ballot the URNG's first National Directorate. It should be noted, however, that neither the secretary-general of the PGT nor any of the three commanders in chief of the guerrilla factions had to stand for election, as this was considered unnecessary.

We mentioned earlier that, unlike the guerrilla movements of the 1960s, those formed in the 1970s functioned in a specific organizational structure. One of the frequent self-criticisms of the guerrillas was that their ties with the urban and rural masses became tenuous. The PGT had always criticized its politico-military allies for this and the point was one of the differences communists had first with the FAR and then with the founders of the EGP. Yet the EGP's founders noted in their own documents the need to select where they would operate by taking into account the characteristics of the population and not just geophysical features; the FAR would come to a similar conclusion in the 1980s. In fact, the three guerrilla fronts elaborated a program of work with the masses to build organizations to perform four tasks: (1) promote forms of struggle that supported the claims of specific social sectors in order to radicalize the population; (2) extend the guerrillas' organization beyond its clandestine base; (3) construct a base of rural and urban social support for the insurrection; and (4) develop a pool of future leaders and staff for the various organizations.

The clandestine groups conceived of the social movements they were either building or had taken over as "broad organizations" in which the guerrillas would have to establish their influence. That implied recruiting the labor, student, and peasant leaders and activists who were most sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. These recruits would then afford the clandestine groups privileged access to the various organizations, maximizing their influence. In general, and recognizing that each organization had a slightly different approach, it was the Leninist conception of mass organizations as the revolutionaries' "conveyor belts" that dominated the clandestine groups' thinking about what we now call civil society. Even when the members of a clandestine group were a minority in a mass organization, this was enough to leave the latter with little or no autonomy. Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Revolutionary organizations and their affiliated mass organizations

<i>Politico-Military Group</i>	<i>Popular Organization</i>
Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, PGT (1949) (Guatemalan Labor Party)	Federación Autónoma Sindical de Guatemala, FASGUA (1957)
	Escuela de Orientación Sindical, EOS (1975-1980)
	Frete (organización estudiantil universitaria)
	Movimiento Nacional de Pobladores, MONAP
	Coordinadora de Estudiantes de Educación Media, CEEM
Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes, FAR (1968) (Rebel Armed Forces)	Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical, CNUS, 1976
	Central Nacional de Trabajadores, CNT
Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, EGP (1972) (Guerrilla Army of the Poor)	Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC (1978)
	Coordinadora Nacional de Pobladores, CONAP
	Frete Estudiantil Revolucionario Robin García, FERG- educación media
	Frete Estudiantil Revolucionario Robin García, FERG- educación universitaria
	Frete de Trabajadores de Guatemala, FTG
Organización del Pueblo en Armas, ORPA (1979) (Organization of the People in Arms)	

sketches the links between the revolutionaries and their associated civil society organizations.

The Peace Accords and Their Effect on the URNG

Officially, the URNG never accepted that it had been defeated in the counterinsurgent offensives of 1979 and 1983. Even after the conclusion of hostilities, in January 1997, the secretary-general of the URNG, Comandante Rolando Moran (Ricardo Ramirez) asserted that the armed struggle had not been defeated. Rather, he declared that negotiations had started precisely because the state could not defeat the insurgents. Nevertheless, despite the extreme weakness of the Guatemalan insurgency, nine years of negotiations came to an end on December 29, 1996 when the URNG, the Guatemalan government, and the UN Mediating Mission signed the Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradero (Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace). By this act, 36 years of internal conflict drew to a formal close.²⁴

As we have already indicated, the process began in 1986, with the two sides first meeting formally in October 1987. However, it was not until March 1990 that a delegation from the National Commission for Reconciliation, which was composed of leaders from various sectors of Guatemalan society, the government, and representatives of the URNG, signed the Acuerdo Basico para la Búsqueda de la Paz por medios políticos (Basic Agreement to Seek Peace by Political Means), the so-called Oslo Accord. Then followed meetings between the URNG and representatives from various sectors of Guatemala's civil society (business, the churches, academics, the popular movement) that led to agreements on procedures (April 26, 1991) and democratization (July 25, 1991). After that, negotiations stalled for over two years, until January 1994, when a framework agreement for restarting talks was signed.

The next step was to set up a schedule for talks (March 1994) when the parties also signed a global agreement on human rights. Other deals were concluded later. These included

- the Agreement to Resettle Populations Displaced by Armed Confrontations (June 1994); an undertaking to establish a truth commission (June 1994);
- an agreement on native rights and indigenous identity (March 1995);
- an agreement treating economic and agrarian questions (May 1995);
- an understanding regarding the function of civil society and the role of the military in a democracy (September 1996);

- the Accord for a Definitive Cease-fire, which also treated constitutional amendments, the electoral system, legalizing the URNG, a calendar for implementing the peace treaty, and the Basic Agreement itself (December 1996).²⁵

The 1991 democratization accord set out the agenda for future talks and, more importantly, for a nation-building project in which the revolutionary Left would abandon violent struggle for legality and peaceful and electoral political competition. The new society would see the preeminence of civil society; the development of democratic institutions; the effective establishment of the rule of law and respect for human rights; an end to political repression, electoral fraud and coercion, military coups, and antidemocratic destabilization generally; civilian control of the military; the resettlement of displaced populations; recognition of indigenous identity and native rights; and the establishment of a practical social justice in which all Guatemalans would share in the country's wealth.²⁶ The final document, the Firm and Durable Peace Accord of December 1996, summarized all the points agreed to earlier and added the stipulation that Guatemalans had the right to know the truth regarding human rights violations and other acts of violence that occurred during the war. There was also an appendix laying out the spirit of the earlier (1995) agreement of the economy and agriculture. This noted that as the rural population was especially affected by poverty, injustice, and weak government institutions it was the duty of government and all sectors of society to join forces to address the problem of rural underdevelopment.²⁷

Why was the peace process so long and complicated? Obviously, there were many obstacles and difficulties encountered along the way, but the guerrilla's extreme weakness was perhaps the most important cause. The URNG never had the solidity and force of El Salvador's FMLN, let alone that of the Sandinistas who governed for a decade. The Left in Guatemala, which was grouped around the URNG and whose numbers were increased by the popular movements, always trailed behind the regional peace efforts. In fact, it was thanks to the work of international organizations like the UN and the various human rights organization that the government came to negotiate with the guerrillas. Even then, however, real progress only began after the combatants were "advised" that a continuation of armed conflict would delay Guatemala's entry into the community of democratic nations—and their markets. With reference to their political effects, the peace accords demanded a new perspective on two issues essential to the identity of the Guatemalan revolutionary Left: democracy and revolution. In part this was due to the conjuncture which

coincided with the collapse of what was then called "actually existing socialism" and the new climate of world affairs that accompanied the fall of Soviet communism. The conjuncture also tempered the Guatemalan government's anticommunism, allowing more room for concessions. And with socialism no longer on the horizon, the insurgents had to reformulate their vision of democracy and change their meaning of the word "revolution."

This new panorama offered a solution to the dilemma that the revolutionary Left had faced on several occasions: should it fight for democracy to open the way to revolution or should it make revolution to make democracy possible? Participating in the negotiations that started in 1987 demanded accepting, at first implicitly and later explicitly, the former. To accept this was to recognize that the revolutionary movement had lost the historic opportunity for a revolutionary seizure of power, an objective that had been the bedrock of its identity.²⁸ For the URNG to abandon the proposition of a revolutionary conquest of power and accept participating with the framework of a representative democracy required a drastic reformulation of the ends of the revolutionary Left. It demanded accepting representative democracy as the starting point for social transformation, instead of continuing to assume that revolutionary transformation was the point of departure for the construction of new kind of democracy.

The URNG Becomes a Political Party

It took several years for the bulk of both the leaders and rank and file of the URNG to accept that the peace talks with the Guatemalan government were not a tactical ploy but a serious effort to end years of internal war. And it was the course of the negotiations and of the agreements reached over the course of those ten years that prompted a significant ideological turnaround by the insurgent organizations. In mid-1995, just before that year's presidential elections, the URNG and the government had concluded agreements on democratizing the country (which set out the issues that the participants would negotiate), a truth commission, human rights, indigenous rights, resettlement of the displaced, agriculture and the economy. They also approved procedures and a timetable for future negotiations. That same year the URNG published a manifesto that displayed its new ideological profile.²⁹

That document expressed the organization's ideas regarding the social and political changes for which it would fight. Naturally, the terms socialism, communism, and proletariat all disappeared, as did revolution, agrarian reform, and imperialism. The document was actually surprisingly moderate. It spoke of a new Guatemala that would grow from the

construction of a multicultural and multilingual nation, as well as of demilitarizing the country and rooting out official corruption. To move the country in this direction the URNG envisioned nine targets for change: 1) modernize agriculture; 2) tax reform; 3) labor reform, notably the labor code and the civil service law; 4) decentralize power and change the relationship between the city, especially the capital, and the countryside; 5) educational reform; 6) reform public health; 6) restructure the public service; 7) promote effective, sustainable development; 8) reform the social security system; 9) adopt a new foreign policy that is independent, active, and progressive. The scope of these proposals made it clear that despite the gravity of the problems facing Guatemala, the URNG felt the country could be saved "without traumatic changes or spectacular transformations."³⁰ Such was the ideological climate that prevailed while the Left was getting ready to run its own candidates in the November 1995 presidential elections. The old divisions and disputes that had split the Left during the years of armed combat still existed, however. One group of former dissident Left activists, Octubre Revolucionario (Revolutionary October) and PGT-6 de enero (PGT-6th of January) participated actively in what would come to be called the Frente Democrático Nueva Guatemala (FDNG, New Guatemala Democratic Front). They were quickly pushed aside by officials and members of the URNG who were active in various social movements. At that time, it was practically assured that the presidential candidate of the Left would be Arturo Bauer Paiz, who had been a minister in the governments of the revolutionary era of 1944–1954 and widely respected as a fighter for social justice. However, the URNG met behind closed doors and to the consternation of not a few of its followers declared that the candidate would be Jorge Gonzalez del Valle, an economist known for his opposition to neoliberal policies. As a result, the follower of Bauer Paiz withdrew from the campaign and joined whom the URNG had expelled from the FDNG to form Unidad de Izquierda Democrática (UNID, Democratic Left Unity).

The 1995 election results revealed that party fragmentation and voter volatility characterized the Guatemalan political system as a whole, not just the Left. On the one hand, the parties that had sustained the various military dictatorships (MLN, PID, PR, CAN, CAO) had disappeared. The two major parties that had squared off in elections at the end of 1985 and the beginning of 1986, the Union del Centro Nacional (UCN, National Center Union) and the Democrática Cristiana (DC, Christian Democrats) were rendered almost insignificant, as was the party of President Jorge Serrano, the Movimiento de Acción Solidaria (MAS, Solidarity Action

Movement), after his failed attempt to dissolve congress and suspend the courts in 1993.

There were, though, two major political forces that faced off in 1995: the Partido de Avanzada Nacional (PAN, Party of National Advancement), which put forward Alvaro Arzu, and the Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG, Guatemalan Republican Front), whose candidate was Alfonso Portillo, a one-time member of the EGP. The PAN succeed in gaining the support of the Comité Coordinador de Camarás del Agro Comercio Industria y Finanzas (CACIF, Coordinating Committee of the Chambers of Agriculture, Commerce, Industry and Finance), which, as its name suggests, was the umbrella organization of Guatemalan big businesses. Its chief opponent, the FRG, capitalized on the prestige of General Efraín Ríos Montt among the emerging bourgeoisie, urban middle classes, and the campesinos who had served in the PACS organized under the general's rule. The Left was able to ally with what was left of the Partido Revolucionario (Revolutionary Party), led by Rafael Arriaga (son of the repressive [minister of defense in the government of Mendez Montenegro] and to use its official registration to run as the FDNG. The election results are found in table 3.2.

Table 3.2 shows that abstentions (53.2%) won without need for a second round. However, counting only the votes that were cast required a runoff, which Alvaro Arzú won. Looking at the Left, the FDNG's nearly 7 percent of the vote was a credible result for a group that had not yet abandoned clandestinity and had to work through those of its supporters who could

Table 3.2 Results of the first round of presidential elections, 1995

<i>Voters</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of eligible voters</i>
Eligible voters	3,711,589	100.00
Total votes	1,737,033	46.80
Valid votes	1,544,636	41.61
<i>Results</i>	<i>Percentage of total votes</i>	
Spoiled or blank ballots	192,397	5.18
PAN	564,739	32.51
FRG	341,038	19.63
FDNG	119,056	6.85
Other parties	519,803	29.92

Source: *Political Data Base of the Americas*. Republic of Guatemala, Electoral Results, 1995 Presidential Elections, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Electdata/Guate/guate.html>, accessed July 9, 2007.

operate legally. Further, the FDNG's 6.85 percent of the vote won it a third place. The remaining parties in the race took three-tenths of all votes cast, but those were so widely dispersed that they had minimal effect.

During the following four years, the PAN government concluded the peace treaty with the URNG that ended the long internal conflict. Nevertheless, the PAN suffered the same fate that has befallen every governing party in Guatemala since the middle of the twentieth century: defeat at the next election.

In those same four years, the URNG entered public, legal political life. Ironically, the ex-guerrillas occupied the political space that Social Democrats had long fought to open, much as happened in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The former guerrilla command accordingly made its debut in public life in control of the reformed and restructured forces of the Left. However, the process of gaining control of these forces produced conflicts. One of these saw Rafael Arriaga terminate his alliance with the URNG, while another resulted in the FDNG organizing its electoral campaign independently of others. Part of the broad social movement close to the former guerrillas felt itself marginalized and Left the URNG, though not the electoral alliance then forming to launch the candidacy of Álvaro Colom.

Examining the results of the first round of the 1999 elections (table 3.3), we see the rise of the FRG, which went from roughly 20 percent in 1995 to over 43 percent, and the defeat of the PAN, which fell from 33 percent to

27 percent. The Left, running as the ANN, came in a distant third, its 150,000 votes amounting to 11 percent of the vote; this rises to over 12 percent if the votes of the FDNG are added. An 8.5 percent fall in the number of blank or spoiled ballots can be attributed to the concentration of the vote among three main parties.

In the next elections in 2003, there were 13 registered parties. Most of them were small, recently founded, and with uncertain life expectancies. The URNG was one of four parties (along with the PAN, FRG, and ANN) had run in more than one election campaign. The FRG found itself in a difficult situation, as its presidential candidate, Efraín Ríos Montt, had not been registered. Moreover, it faced the costs that came from its time in office, a period characterized by corruption and preeminence of the "invisible powers,"³¹ while the PAN continued the downward slide that had led to its defeat in 1999. In 2000, a group of former officials from the Arzu administration broke with the PAN and formed the Partido Unionista (PU, Unionist Party). Oscar Berger, the PAN's presidential candidate and the most important opponent of the FRG, split from the party that nominated him and headed a coalition composed of the Partido Patriota (Patriotic Party) and two others. For the 2003 elections the URNG put forward as its presidential candidate Rodrigo Asturias, the former comandante Gaspar Ilon, on a ticket with Pablo Ceto. URNG dissidents, along with other political forces that had regrouped in the ANN, coalesced early on around the former mayor of Quetzaltenango, Rigoberto Queme. Once again, Guatemala's Left was unable to leave its insurgent past behind and form a competitive party. Comandante Pablo Monsanto had abandoned the URNG for a dissident group named the Corriente Revolucionario (Revolutionary Current, CR) that along with two other small organizations, the Frente Democrático Social (FDS, Social Democratic Front) and UNID, ran in a reorganized ANN which was a project for a pluralist, participatory Left.

During the months before the November 2003 elections, the ANN proved that it could not live up to its claims of pluralism and participation. When it came time to choose congressional candidates, the FDS and UNID, as well as Queme, the presidential candidate, felt as though they had been steamrollered by the CR. Indeed the CR pulled the strings of the nascent party and used its control to impose Monsanto at the top of the list for national deputies.³² Other CR members also pushed aside potential candidates from other parties in the alliance. These maneuvers proved costly as Rigoberto Queme withdrew as the party's presidential nominee, leaving the ANN with only a congressional slate. When the results were in the URNG had just over 69,000 votes and 3 legislative seats, while the

Table 3.3 Results from the first round of presidential elections, 1999

Voters	Number	Percentage of eligible voters
Eligible voters	4,458,744	100.00
Total votes	2,379,989	53.37
Valid votes	2,175,458	48.79
Results	Percentage of total votes	
Spoiled or blank ballots	203,531	4.56
FRG	1,037,775	43.60
PAN	660,404	27.74
ANN	268,001	11.26
FDNG	27,832	1.16
Other parties	181,446	7.62

Source: *Political Data Base of the Americas*. Republic of Guatemala, Electoral Results, 1999 Presidential Elections (First Round), <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/Guate/guate.html>, accessed July 9, 2007.

ANN legislative candidates received 124,000 votes and took 6 seats in congress. The weakness of the URNG's presidential ticket (Astrurias-Ceto) was best shown by the fact that the party took roughly 30,000 more votes in legislative contests. But the URNG was weak even at the local level, winning only 8 of 331 mayoralties. Thus the ANN significantly outperformed the URNG, even without a presidential candidate. They did, however, have in Nineth Montenegro, a charismatic human rights activist, a magnetic figure who drew votes. Yet the ANN's relative success was short-lived as Montenegro Left in May 2005 to form her own party, Encuentro por Guatemala (Getting Together for Guatemala). With respect to the URNG, their own assessment of their showing led them to the dispiriting conclusion that "our election results constitute such a serious setback that the party must now have a serious discussion of its principles and practices."³³

In fact, the results were disastrous for the Left as a whole. Although in 1995, while still operating semi-clandestinely, the Left built a coalition around the FDNG that captured 7 percent of the vote. In 1999 the ANN coalition took 11 percent. But 2003 produced a split between the URNG and the ANN that saw only 5 percent of Guatemalans voters support the Left. These last results were particularly disastrous for the URNG, whose 2.58 percent share suggest that the party may be headed for extinction. However, the ANN is little better off, as its star candidate in 2003, Nineth Montenegro, has Left; indeed it could even lose its status as an official party. Concerning Montenegro's new organization, Encuentro por Guatemala, it is currently seeking registration as an official party.

Turning to the parties of the right, the FRG finally succeeded in registering General Efraín Ríos Montt as its presidential candidate. Despite the former dictator's appeal as a caudillo, however, his party's record in office was too much to overcome. The PAN, another former governing party, fell to fourth place, while a coalition of small parties (Partido Patriota—Patriotic Party, Movimiento Reformador—Reform Movement, and Partido de Solidaridad Nacional—National Solidarity Party) had the support of a substantial part of Guatemalan business and was able to ride the coattails of the winning presidential candidate, Oscar Berger, to become the country's largest party. Second place went the Union Nacional del Esperanza (UNE, National Union of Hope), whose presidential candidate, Alvaro Colom, also finished behind Berger in the presidential runoff held in December 2003. Table 3.4 presents the results of the first round of the 2003 elections.

Table 3.4 Results from the first round of the presidential elections of 2003

Voters	Numbers	Percentage of eligible voters
Eligible voters	6,413,032	100
Total votes	2,937,169	45.8
Valid votes	2,683,779	41.85
Results	Percentage of total vote	
Spoiled or blank ballots	253,290	8.63
PP-MR-PSN	921,233	31.37
UNE	707,578	24.09
FRG	518,328	17.65
PAN	224,127	7.63
PU	80,943	2.76
URNG	69,297	2.36
Other parties	166,273	5.45
ANN	123,853	*

Source: *Political Data Base of the Americas*. Republic of Guatemala, Electoral Results, 2003 Presidential Elections (First Round). <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/Guata/guatac.html>, accessed July 9, 2007.

*Did not run a presidential candidate; votes for legislative candidates.

Conclusion

The historical analysis presented in this chapter show that since the second half of the 1990s the URNG's political vision has changed in two ways. First, power is to be gained through electoral struggle. Second, all proposals for social change must be based within the framework of a market economy. Adopting this new stance was only possible because the Guatemalan Left had already made two significant ideological moves. The first was to demote revolution from being the centerpiece of the Left's politics and make it more of a symbol shared by the once revolutionary Left. A second adjustment demanded embracing representative democracy and dealing regularly and peaceably with those who were once mortal enemies to be dealt with only by force of arms.

Still, it must be noted that both the leaders and members of this Left have Marxist ideological roots, even though its programs are now grounded in a pragmatic evaluation of what is possible. It is here that we see the Left's communist past coexisting with its social democratic present and future. And this sort of mixed, even contradictory, consciousness shows up most clearly in moments of internal crisis. Both the Left's dissidents and its

official leaders accuse one another of "right deviationism" or of "having infiltrated neoliberal ideas into our ranks." It is sufficient to recall the formation of the Corriente Revolucionario, headed by Pablo Monsanto, whose very name indicated that it opposed the line the older organization was taking. In a sense, these splinters base their legitimacy on their claim to be the defenders of revolutionary purity. Facing perpetual internal revolts suggests that Guatemala's Left can neither define a common vision for itself and the country nor accommodate dissenters. At the root of this problem is the maintenance of the tightly disciplined, rigidly hierarchical organizations that grew from crossing Leninism with a politico-military command structure.

We can put this somewhat differently by saying that the political organizations of the former Guatemalan guerrillas accept democracy for the country as a whole but preferred to keep power concentrated in the leader's hands internally. There are, though, some signs that this is changing. Rolando Moran and Gaspar Ilón have died, their leadership styles dying with them. The last of the three historic guerrilla comandantes, Pablo Monstanto, has left the URNG and his new group, Corriente Revolucionario, of which he is the unquestioned leader, remains very marginal. The fourth member of what was once the high command of the URNG, the last secretary-general of the PGT, Carlos Gonzalez (Ricardo Rosales), currently holds an ambiguous position within the URNG. None of them had the brilliance or moral authority of Schaffick Handal, secretary-general of the Salvadoran Communist Party and later unsuccessful presidential candidate of the FMLN;³⁴ nor did Handal have his leadership questioned as theirs was following the splits that rocked the PGT after 1978.

There is, however, a broad base of ideological and programmatic agreement within Guatemala's Left today. It insists that democracy cannot be had without social justice, that the market must be regulated and limited in its reach, and that a strong state is necessary to assure that the public interest prevails over the private. And the Left has not abandoned its belief in the utopia of a new society, although it moderated its programs for achieving this dream. These ideological and programmatic differences clearly distinguish the Guatemalan Left from its right-wing counterparts, even if the demands of practical electoral politics sometimes make the two camps adopt similar positions.

This change of posture by the Left has been abrupt and rapid, and it was not carried out in a climate of organizational stability. Rather, these changes have come about in a context of conflicts arising from the residue of a political culture of clandestinity. That outlook glorified a mystique of militancy built around complete dedication to the revolution,

total self-sacrifice, and unconditional struggle. Therefore the passage from "struggle and faith" to focusing on electoral calculations and winning office produced a significant symbolic shock. Today's typical member of a left-wing party is what Panebianco³⁵ called a careerist, someone who neither fits well with nor is well regarded by the classic "believers" who in the past were the heart of Guatemala's leftist political organizations.

We believe that the above explains why this process of change has been accompanied by the emergence of violent internal confrontations that have nearly always ended in divisions, expulsions, resignations, and conflicts, occasionally serious ones, between officials and the rank and file. It is probably precisely these internal conflicts that have most seriously damaged the credibility and drained the political capital of the parties descended from the guerrillas. In the URNG's "adaptation" to the imperatives of this new political reality three elements stand out:

- its self-identification as a political formation of the Left, as can be seen in its speeches, proclamations, and electoral platforms;
- the party's incessant internal turmoil, where confrontation with those who control power (generally those linked to the party's secretary-general) usually leads to expulsion, political irrelevance, and/or leaving to form new parties that have to date had precarious existences;
- its inability to gain electoral support at the local level or to build coalitions in the legislature, unlike the FSLN in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador.

Overall, the URNG's move from the underground to the legal has left a meager legacy. This is evident when we consider the cost paid by several generations of Guatemalans to secure democratic government and its attendant freedoms, on the one hand, and the country's socioeconomic reality of increasingly widespread poverty and social exclusion, on the other. The end to the fighting, the disappearance of even the possibility of revolution, the unviability of socialism and increasingly, even an inability to define socialism in practice all combined to produce the current crisis of the Guatemalan Left. As both the FSLN and FMLN have been able to maintain their organizational integrity while confronting this same crisis of socialism,³⁶ we must ask why Guatemala's ex-guerrillas have so plainly failed.

Answering this question requires forwarding new hypotheses. With respect to the Sandinistas, the most plausible explanation is that the FSLN

seized power and governed Nicaragua throughout the 1980s, giving it time to embed itself in Nicaraguan society. It is difficult to imagine the Sandinistas having the resources, influence, and media presence they enjoy today had they not governed the country for ten years. Turning to the FMLN, the simple truth is that the URNG never came near to having the military and political power of the Salvadorans. This state of affairs can be explained in terms of the following factors. First, Guatemala is far more ethnically diverse and socially heterogeneous than El Salvador. Its geographic and cultural fault lines are more marked, making political organization harder. Second, it suffered under a dictatorship that ruled by a terror more cruel and sophisticated than its Salvadoran counterpart: many leaders and activists in Guatemala's revolutionary Left were simply physically eliminated by the state. The most vulnerable and weakest of the three revolutionary movements, the Guatemalan, was also the one that suffered the fiercest repression.

Despite all that we have set out in this chapter, we do not believe that there is no future for the Left in Guatemala. Renewal of the Left need not mean that it abandon all that has shaped its identity. It is even possible that the disappearance of Left's historic standard bearers can open the way for a new movement with new ideas and a more democratic structure. Moreover, Guatemala has certain characteristics that it shares with Bolivia and Ecuador, and which can favor the revival of the Left. Each of the three shows high levels of electoral volatility, has a fractionalized party system, and works with a permeable electoral system, which add up to opportunities for parties now on the margins to break through. Further, Guatemala shares with the two Andean states a large indigenous population, a mobilized civil society, a highly polarized society, and a political system that suffers recurrent crises of legitimacy. Only time will tell if these traits can be converted into political opportunities that permit Guatemala's Left to regain and even expand the political influence it had through most of the second half of the last century.

Notes

Translated by David Close.

1. The PGT first proposed adopting armed struggle in 1955 and at its 1960 congress laid out the possibility of "combining all forms of struggle." These recommendations took concrete form in 1962 when the party openly participated in the founding of the first Rebel Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*, FAR), an organization that must be distinguished from the better-known FAR founded in 1968. This first FAR was conceived as the military arm of the

PGT, in which both PGT members and revolutionaries who were not formally communists would serve, but with the PGT retaining political control. In part, it was the party's insistence on directing the FAR that led the FAR to split from the PGT in 1967. However, the PGT also continued backing electoral struggle, putting forward candidates for election and by giving covert support to Christian Democrats and social Democrats.

2. We cannot overemphasize the impact the Cuban Revolution had on a generation of young activists, rapidly politicized by the array of symbolic, discursive, and organizational elements that the "new revolutionary Left" generated. See, Salvador Martí i Puig, "Nacimiento y mutación de la izquierda revolucionaria centroamericana" in *La izquierda revolucionaria en Centroamérica. De la lucha armada a la participación electoral*, ed, Salvador Martí i Puig and Carlos Figueroa (Madrid: Libros de la Catarata, 2006), 15–52.
3. Régis Débray and Ricardo Ramírez. "Guatemala" in *Las Pruebas de Fuego*, ed. Régis Débray (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1975), pp. 285–286.
4. Humberto Alvarado, *Apuntes para la historia del Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*, Colección Revolucionaria, editado por la Comisión para la Conmemoración del cincuentenario de la revolución de octubre (edited by the Commission for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Revolution of October 1944) (Guatemala City: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala y la Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios "Oliverio Castañeda de León," 1994), p. 55.
5. Débray and Ramírez, "Guatemala," p. 290; Alvarado, *Apuntes*, p. 65.
6. Débray and Ramírez, "Guatemala," p. 299. Luis Turcios Lima was, along with Marco Aurelio Yon Sosa, one of the two disgruntled army officers who founded the FAR.
7. Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, *El camino de la revolución guatemalteca* (Mexico City: Ediciones De Cultura Popular, 1972).
8. Mario Fayeras, *Los fusiles de octubre* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos Editor, 1991).
9. Héctor Gramajo, *De la guerra... a la guerra* (Guatemala City: Fondo de Cultura, 1995), pp. 154–155.
10. Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), *Proclama Unitaria de las organizaciones EGP, FAR, ORPA, PGT al pueblo de Guatemala* (Mimeo), February 1982, (UNRG, 2/1982).
11. Gramajo, *De la guerra*.
12. Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, "La izquierda revolucionaria en Nicaragua: Revolución para la democracia, democracia para la revolución" in *La izquierda revolucionaria en Centroamérica*, ed, Martí i Puig and Figueroa, pp. 129–172.
13. Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, *El recurso del miedo: Ensayo sobre Estado y terror en Guatemala* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1991).
14. Mario Payeras, *El trueno en la ciudad. Episodios de la lucha armada urbana de 1981 en Guatemala* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos Editor, 1987).
15. Figueroa Ibarra, *El recurso del miedo*, p. 235. The creation of the PAC, paramilitary groups composed of local people, involved the forced recruitment

of the inhabitants of a given area to carry out military functions. This greatly increased the militarization of rural society and led to the PAC members' participation in human rights violations perpetrated by the army.

16. Growth poles presupposed concentrating an area's indigenous population in camps under the control of military commanders, in order to "uproot the population," indoctrinate it, and "inoculate" it against insurgency.
17. Ricardo Falla, *Masacres en la selva Ixcán, Guatemala 1975-1980* (Managua, Nicaragua: CRIES-latino editores, 1992).
18. See the following URNG documents: Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca. Proclama Unitaria de las organizaciones EGP, FAR, ORPA, PGT al pueblo de Guatemala (Mimeo), February 1982; Las maniobras políticas de Ríos Montt y el papel del movimiento popular y democrático (Mimeo), Guatemala, February 1983; Fracaso militar de la campaña "Victoria 82" de Ríos Montt, Imposibilidad de la maniobra reformista, Seguridad del triunfo del pueblo y la revolución en Guatemala (Mimeo), Guatemala, March 1983; Ante el golpe de estado de los altos jefes militares del ejército de Guatemala contra el general Ríos Montt (Mimeo), August 10, 1983; Informaciones sobre la actual coyuntura política guatemalteca, Guatemala (Mimeo), June 1985; Al pueblo de Guatemala, edición clandestina September 1985; Declaración Política de la URNG en su V aniversario, Guatemala, February 7, 1987, in URNG, *Boletín internacional 2* (March 1987); Comunicado de la Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca con motivo de su VI aniversario (Guatemala), February 7, 1988, edición clandestina.
19. *Infopress*, 1995, pp. 9-11. Infopress Centroamericana. *Compendio del proceso de Paz. Cronologías, análisis, documentos, acuerdos*. Vol. I. Guatemala City: Infopress Centroamericana, 1995.
20. Octubre Revolucionario, Carta del Comité de Dirección de Octubre Revolucionario a los militantes del Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT-6 de enero) (Mimeo), March 1990, pp. 7-8.
21. Angelo Panebianco, *Modelos de partidos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990).
22. We use this concept as does Panebianco in *Modelos De Partido*. The structure of organizational power is based on the "resources of organizational power," which are the factors around which an organization's vital activities, competition, relations with its environment, communication, formal rules, finance, and recruitment, develop.
23. The PGT (National Directing Nucleus—NDN) was one of three factions, the others being the January 6th (6 de enero) and the Central Committee (CC), to emerge after a split in the party over the issue of armed struggle. In 1987, following the effective destruction of the NDN, the URNG brought the PGT-CC in to replace the NDN. What seemed to be the continued presence of the PGT in the URNG was accomplished by one faction of the party succeeding another.
24. Fundación Casa de la Reconciliación, *Recopilación cronológica. Acuerdos firmados en la negociación por la paz en Guatemala*. (Guatemala City: Casa de la Reconciliación, 1997), p. 23.
25. Reconciliación, 1997, pp. 5-9.
26. Reconciliación, 1997, 99.
27. Reconciliación, 1997, pp. 348-349.
28. Panebianco, *Modelos De Partido*, p. 40 and pp. 67-68.
29. URNG, Guatemala, propuesta a la sociedad: Cuatro objetivos, nueve cambios, cuatro prioridades (Mimeo), April 1995.
30. URNG, Guatemala, propuesta a la sociedad, p. 14.
31. During the second half of the 1990s and through the first five years of the twenty-first century, the term "invisible powers" meant the multiple mafia-style networks of extortion, which emerged after the peace agreements and that certainly appear to be the current incarnation of what were once counter-insurgent groups, though this cannot be proven. Among their activities one finds a combination of economic crimes, human rights violations, and the selective intimidation of left-wing political activists.
32. National deputies are elected from a nationwide list, separate from departmental ones.
33. URNG, Los acuerdos de paz. Análisis de su cumplimiento y perspectivas (Mimeo), Guatemala City, May 2003.
34. Editors' note: Handal's reputation suffered greatly after leading the FMLN to a poor showing the 2004 presidential elections, at which point his leadership and even the appropriateness of the historic, revolutionary identity of the FMLN in an electoral setting, came to be questioned.
35. Panebianco, *Modelos De Partido*.
36. Editors' note: the chapter by David Close on Nicaragua, addresses this question indirectly. For a more inclusive vision see, Martí i Puig, "La Izquierda Centroamericana: ¿Renacimiento o Debacle?" in *América Central, las democracias inciertas*, ed. Ana Sofía Cardenal and Salvador Martí i Puig (Madrid: Tecnos, 1998), pp. 65-108.