

WARID: El Salvador (FMLN) 1980-1991
STARDATE: 18 May 1980
ENDDATE: 31 December 1991
Related cases: none
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Conflict overview

While political disillusionment and the virulence of social struggles were growing in the latter part of the 1970s, leftist organizations including workers movements and landless peasant movements unified in El Salvador. The victory of the Sandinista Liberation Front in Nicaragua in July of 1979, in particular, further exacerbated the confrontations. While the Government of El Salvador (GOES)¹ prepared itself for a “strategy of total annihilation” to prevent a similar revolution from occurring in El Salvador, the fall of the Somoza-regime in Nicaragua once more confirmed to the revolutionary movements that armed struggle was the only way to acquire power (Torres-Rivas 1998: 218). Finally, in October 1980, the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberación Nacional) was founded as a result of the great popular insurrections after the assassination of Archbishop Romero. Under the umbrella of the FMLN, five major revolutionary guerrilla groups unified their political representation in order to reclaim their de facto property rights, to fight against political repression and, in general, to “challenge the oligarchic alliance of the economic and political elites of the country” (Wood 2000: 51).

The FMLN counted on extensive peasant support and eventually turned into an “insurgent counter-elite” (Wood 2000: 51), whose military capacity was able to fight an eleven-year civil war [**WARDUR=139**]. Despite strong assistance from the US Government, the El Salvadoran Armed Forces were forced into a military stalemate by the end of the 1980s. Several peace negotiations monitored by the UN followed and led to the final Chapultepec Peace Agreement, announced in December 1991 and signed in January 1992 [**WARENDUC=1; WARENDOS=1**].

1 Since the rebelling FMLN did not target a particular political party but the political and economic order in general, we will treat the government of the El Salvadoran state as the rebels’ opposing conflict party, despite changes in the concrete political parties ruling the country over time. During the post-war period, we will treat the conservative ‘Alianza Republicana Nacionalista’ (ARENA) as the FMLN’s opposing conflict party. The ARENA party ruled from 1989 until 2009.

According to estimates by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), armed combats claimed 13,765 lives by the end of 1991 [FATALUC=14000].² Other sources indicate a higher death toll of 75,000 [FATALOS=75000].³ According to the World Bank, the pre-war population amounted to 4,582,000 in 1979 [PREWARPO=4600000].⁴ Consequently, applying UCDP data to fatalities in relation to the total pre-war population, the war intensity amounts to 0.3% [INTENSUC=0.3]. If applying the estimates from other sources, the war intensity amounts to 1.63% [INTENSOS=1.63].

The military balance at the end of war

Case-specific literature agrees that by the end of the 1980s, the Salvadoran civil war was at a stalemate, as neither conflict party had achieved (or could achieve) a military victory under the prevailing conditions [VICTORY=0].⁵

Over the course of war, the FMLN managed to take over a large portion of the state's territory (Cunningham et al. 2009). Although its first national-scale offensive in January 1981 failed at defeating the armed forces and grasping power, the guerrilla organization retreated to the northeast areas of the country and took control over these territories (especially in Morazán and Chalatenango). The FMLN did not only control these areas militarily but also established so-called 'popular powers' (Alvaréz 2010: 18). The guerrilla groups made a great effort to stop the ongoing work of the state's local and judicial administrations in its areas of control and to maintain clandestine support structures for the revolutionaries (Alvaréz 2010: 20).

According to Alvaréz (2010: 20), the FMLN controlled at least a quarter of the country's territory from mid-1982 to late 1983. In the late 1980s, the rebel side was even able to wage war in 10 of the 14 departments, preventing local authorities from being functional in almost half of the municipalities (Alvaréz 2010: 20). Finally, at the end of war, the FMLN was allegedly in control of one-third of the country's territory (Call 2003: 831). In sum, we conclude that the rebel side was still in control of the larger part of its territories by the end of war [REBTERR=1]; it controlled less territories in comparison to the GOES, [MORETERR= -1].

The relative fighting capacity of the rebel side is rated as 'low' by Cunningham et al. (2009). However, as their last national offensive in late 1989 had demonstrated, the FMLN still had sufficient military strength to keep fighting for an extended period of time. We therefore

2 http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=51®ionSelect=4-Central_Americas# (20 Jun 2014).

3 Kurtenbach 1995: 184.

4 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?page=6> (20 Jun 2014).

5 Wood 2000: 80.

deviate from the coding decision by Cunningham et al. (2009) and qualify FMLN's fighting capacity as 'moderate' [**REBFIGHT=0; CONFIGHT=0**]. Neither side captured or killed the opponent's political leader [**LEADER=0**].

In sum, the military balance at the end of war perfectly mirrors the situation of a stalemate between the conflict parties [**WARBAL=0**].

The post-war military balance

The peace negotiations revolved around two central issues: first, the democratization and demilitarization of society, and, second, the integration of the guerrilla forces into the legal political system of the state (Segovia 2009: 4). Commitments to these two issues were laid out in several agreements from 1990 to the final Chapultepec Agreement in 1992.

Since many provisions of the peace agreement aimed at transforming the repressive and powerful armed forces of both conflict parties (cf. Chapter I and II of the Chapultepec Agreement 1992), this implies that there were changes in the military balance in the post-war period: in contrast to the FMLN, the GOES did not agree to dismantling its military forces and it also refused to accept FMLN troops into the ranks of its military. Only the newly founded National Civilian Police (PNC) was agreed upon for incorporating former FMLN guerrilla fighters (20%) and former members of the national police (20%) along with personnel who had recently joined their ranks (remaining 60%).⁶ However, "[i]n practice, the FMLN did not fill its quota, so the force was even more heavily civilian than planned" (Stanley 2006: 110-111). Therefore, we cannot determine any substantial participation of the FMLN in the country's military and police forces until the FMLN came to power by winning the presidential elections in 2009 [**STATEFOR 1992-2008= -1, STATEFOR 2009-2012=1**]. In accordance with the peace agreement (Chapter VII), the FMLN demobilized its troops during the first post-war year in 1992 in a five-step process; by the end of 1992 (on 15 December), all combatants of the 15,009 activists were demobilized (Alvaréz 2010: 23). The state's armed forces, as mentioned above, reduced their ranks – dropping from 63,170 in size as of 1992 to 30,500 by 1994 – but refused to incorporate former guerrilla combatants (Call 2003: 835). Therefore, we count the state military as separate armed forces of the government [**SEPFORCE 1992=0, SEPFORCE 1993-2008= -1**]. Since the president is the highest commander of the military forces (Constitution: Art. 157), the FMLN is deemed to have obtained exclusive control of the state's armed forces from 2009 onwards after winning the election [**SEPFORCE 2009-2012=1**]. Looking at these developments, calculating a change in

6 Alvaréz 2010: 33; Chapultepec Agreement 1992: Chapter II, 4.

the ratios of troops and arms is not possible [**TROOPS 1992-2012=n.r.**; **ARMS 1992-2012=n.r.**].

After having demobilized its troops by the end of 1992, the FMLN transformed itself into a political party. Hence, we only qualify territories under civilian control as relevant for territorial control in the post-war period. Although the FMLN managed to win the presidential elections only by 2009 and maintained its executive power until the end of our examination period, we find important changes in territorial control on the local level beginning with the elections in March 1997. In 1997, the FMLN was able to significantly improve its municipal presence, winning two of the three largest cities (most importantly San Salvador, the country's capital) and six of the 14 departmental capitals.⁷ Since the municipalities are given significant autonomy by the constitution,⁸ the major position obtained by the FMLN in El Salvador's capital must be equated with control over important territory on the side of the former rebels as of 1997 [**TERRCON 1992=0**, **TERRCON 1993-1996= -1**, **TERRCON 1997-2008=0**, **TERRCON 2009-2012=1**].⁹

The FMLN was in control of one-third of the country's territory by the end of war (Call 2003: 831). Since the rebel side was demobilized by the end of 1992 and its rival ARENA obtained executive power, the side governing at the beginning of was able to gain control over most territories previously controlled by the FMLN [**TERRWIN 1992=0**, **TERRWIN 1993-2008= -1**]. When the FMLN prevailed in the presidential elections in 2009, as the new governing party they controlled the country's entire territory, much more than they had controlled at the end of war [**TERRWIN 2009-2012=1**].

In regards to vulnerability, we assume the side forming the government to be less vulnerable in its territories. For the time between 1996 and 2008, when we assume both sides to have controlled important territories (although on different levels), we code this in favor of ARENA: it formed the central executive power and therefore controlled the state's armed forces [**VULNERAB 1992-2008= -1**, **VULNERAB 2009-2012=1**].

Both parties asked for the creation of a mission to verify the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Established in May 1991 and completed in April 1995, the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) was only a monitoring mission without any armed troops at its disposal [**PEACEKEEP 1992-2012=n.r.**].¹⁰

7 http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1998/el-salvador#.U952UvI_s3k (3 Aug 2014).

8 Cf. Constitución de la República El Salvador: Art. 203.

9 Luther 2008: 242.

10 <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/onusalmandate.html> (28 Jul 2014).

Although the US Government had long supported the GOES in its counter-insurgency measures, it would probably not have intervened in case of a renewed armed conflict, since the geopolitical conditions had changed significantly with passing of the Cold War. Case-specific literature states that the USA and the Soviet Union were no longer committed to continuing their proxy wars in Latin America [**P5ALLY 1992-2012=n.r.**].¹¹

All in all, after the war ended, the military balance in the post-war period mirrored FMLN's military transformation, from its demobilization as a guerrilla group to its insertion into the state's legal structures and military apparatuses [**POSTBAL 1992= -0.4, POSTBAL 1993-1996= -1, POSTBAL 1997-2008= -0.8, POSTBAL 2008-2012=1**]. The same holds true for the total military balance as the combined value of **WARBAL** and **POSTBAL** [**BALANCE 1992= -0.2, BALANCE 1993-1996= -0.5, BALANCE 1997-2008= -0.4, BALANCE 2009-2012=0.5**].

Economy

El Salvador's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita more than tripled in the post-war period.

Table 1: GDP per capita in post-war El Salvador in current USD¹²

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population (total)</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>
1992	5,511,138	1080
1993	5,597,322	1240
1994	5,677,743	1424
1995	5,748,013	1653
1996	5,806,750	1776
1997	5,855,226	1902
1998	5,895,018	2037
1999	5,928,809	2102
2000	5,958,794	2204
2001	5,985,299	2308
2002	6,008,308	2381
2003	6,029,366	2496
2004	6,050,297	2611
2005	6,072,538	2815
2006	6,096,692	3043
2007	6,122,952	3284
2008	6,151,776	3484
2009	6,183,484	3341
2010	6,218,195	3444
2011	6,256,242	3699
2012	6,297,394	3790

11 LeVine 1998: 230.

12 <http://data.worldbank.org/country/el-salvador> (30 Jan 2015).

The scale of compromise after the civil war

Many compromises had to be made in order to reach a satisfactory settlement for the conflict. Regarding the question of how governmental power-sharing could be achieved, the FMLN, for example, had first insisted on being part of a coalition or transitional government. But UN mediators successfully persuaded the rebels to drop this claim and instead focus on reforming and democratizing existing political structures (LeVine 1998: 236). The FMLN agreed on transforming itself into a political party and on participating in the national elections for the first time in 1994. While the governing party, ARENA, won the presidency and a majority of both legislative seats and municipal governments, the FMLN became the second most powerful party in the country. The result was recognized by all parties.

In the following years, the FMLN lost the presidential elections to ARENA but was able to obtain a plurality of seats in the legislature in 2000 and 2003, as well as control of the country's main city governments (Call 2003: 834). Finally, in 2009, the FMLN's candidate Mauricio Funes won the presidential elections and the FMLN obtained the majority in the legislative assembly [**GOVERN 1992-2008= -1, GOVERN 2009-2012=1**].¹³

Neither the peace agreement nor the El Salvadoran Constitution prescribed mandatory consensus-based decision-making between the FMLN and the governing party ARENA. Hence, the respective side governing held exclusive decision-making powers [**VETO 1992-2008= -1, VETO 2009-2012=1; VETOSAT 1992-2012=n.r.**].

The political reforms set forth in the peace accords also aimed at reforming the electoral system, which included "establishing the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, recognizing the right of political parties to exercise review over the preparation, organization, publication and updating of the voter rolls and legalizing the FMLN as a political party and guaranteeing its civil, political and institutional rights" (Segovia 2009: 4-5). According to the Chapultepec Agreement in 1992, the FMLN was given the opportunity to convert into a political party and to enter the legal framework by participating in the state's (basically free and fair) elections [**ELECT 1992-2012=0**].¹⁴

Neither the question of the borders within and outside the country or the allocation of competences among the political levels were a core issue during the conflict nor an issue for compromise in the post-war era [**EXBORDER 2000-2012=n.r.; INBORDER 2000-2012=n.r.; COMPETEN 2000-2012=n.r.**].

Although the economic order was one of the most important issues when the FMLN was founded, its priority decreased when the insurgent group entered into negotiations with the

13 <http://www.tse.gob.sv/2012-01-05-21-47-58/memoria-de-elecciones> (6 Jul 2014).

14 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports> (13 Jul 2014).

government. According to Wood (2000: 81), the FMLN had already redefined its stated goal of socialist revolution and aimed to construct a pluralist democracy when they made their first peace proposal in 1989. The new objective still implied some structural reforms (including further agrarian reforms) but it no longer entailed more radical claims such as the abolition of private property (Wood 2000: 81). The peace agreement was largely limited to the reintegration of former combatants and refugees, while the agrarian reform of 1980 remained unfinished and the second phase was never implemented due to strong resistance from landlords (Kay 2001: 764). We therefore conclude that the GOES prevailed on this issue **[ECONOMY 1992-2012= -1]**.¹⁵

An issue linked to the question of the country's economic order was FMLN's demand for special agrarian programs to the benefit of landless peasants. Indeed, the reintegration of former combatants through the Land Transfer Program (Chap. V of the Chapultepec Agreement) became one of the most contentious issues in the implementation of the Chapultepec Agreement (Del Castillo 1998: 348). Although the agreement set forth several procedures for land exchanges, the implementation process was vaguely defined and, in practice, unworkable. For instance, the accords did not define a total number of beneficiaries nor did they define the critical term "conflict zones", leaving it unclear which regions the land transfer program would actually apply to (Wilkins 1998: 275). Several problems paralyzed the program and delayed its implementation. Del Castillo (1998: 357) states that although the Chapultepec Agreement had foreseen that the legalization of land tenure in the former conflict zones should have been completed by 31 July 1992, the land program was only completed for less than 30% of potential beneficiaries by the end of 1992. We lack precise data on the following years. The case-specific literature unanimously states that there were too many constraints for the successful implementation of the Land Transfer Program (De Bremond 2007: 1543). Since we only consider the actual realization of the compromise as relevant – not its mere formulation on paper –, we code this compromise as generally unimplemented. This was in favor of the side governing at the beginning of war **[SPECPRO 1992-2008= -1]**. Although the FMLN, upon entering the government, did not announce that it would change the neoliberal adjustment measures undertaken by the ARENA party up to that point (Velásquez Carrillo 2011: 20), we assume that the promotion of specific groups (here: poor peasant families) was pursued more forcefully after 2009. We therefore regard the period between 2009 and 2012 as a compromise-like situation in this regard **[SPECPRO 2009-2012=0]**.

15 Wood 2000: 81.

A main issue in the El Salvadoran conflict concerned the state's military and police forces. The power of the country's elite was based on the army and its intelligence services. They rendered political opposition almost impossible by killing candidates or arresting them and deterring the population from actively participating in politics with threats (Ingruber 1999). A key demand of the FMLN was reforming and reducing the military and police forces. In the peace treaties, both sides agreed to reduce the army by 54.4%; they also agreed to disband the secret services and voted for a reform regarding their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, a new education academy for the police was established and all military forces had to undergo criminal examinations that resulted in the discharge of all generals and many colonels (Zinecker 2004: 57). We consider this a compromise, since both sides had to renounce fully enforcing their own demands [**ISSUE 1992-2012=0**].

Another important and contentious issue concerned the creation of an amnesty law. Although both sides had originally agreed upon a specific standard of amnesty defined in the Law of National Reconciliation¹⁶ approved in 1992, one year later, the ARENA-controlled legislative assembly passed a modified amnesty law; it overrode many aspects of the 1992 law and effectively provided amnesty for all crimes committed during the civil war.¹⁷ Since 80% of the crimes committed during the civil war were attributed to the government forces, the implementation of the modified amnesty law was highly beneficial to ARENA.¹⁸ The modified amnesty law remained in force during the whole period under investigation [**ISSUE2 1992=0, ISSUE2 1993-2012= -1**].

No other contentious issues between the conflict parties could be identified [**NEWCON 1992-2012=n.r.; NEWCON2 1992-2012=n.r.**]. Compromises cannot be seen as more favorable for one particular side. Both parties had to make concessions regarding their demands. Thus, we code this variable as not relevant [**BENEFIT 1992-2012=n.r.; BENEFIT2 1992-2012=n.r.**].

The compromises achieved in post-war El Salvador reflect the initial and continuing predominance of the governing side ARENA until 2008; they also perfectly illustrate how the FMLN could later strengthen its political-institutional power and form the government from

16 The standard of amnesty offered under this law was in accordance with International Law, meaning there were clear and specific cases and circumstances that were not eligible for amnesty. Article 6 of the Law of National Reconciliation specified that those responsible for genocide and crimes against humanity would not be extended amnesty. Additionally, any persons named in the UN Truth Commission Report would also not be extended amnesty. These exceptions and all other aspects of this law were accepted by all when signed in 1992, <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2002/1840> (12 Jun 2015).

17 <http://www.asamblea.gob.sv/eparlamento/indice-legislativo/buscador-de-documentos-legislativos/ley-de-amnistia-general-para-la-consolidacion-de-la-paz/?searchterm=None> (12 Jun 2015).

18 Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/ElSalvador-Report.pdf> (12 Jun 2015).

2009 onwards [**COMPROM 1992= -0.57, COMPROM 1993-2008= -0.71, COMPROM 2009-2012=0**].

Stability of peace

The conflict ended in 1992 and we do not detect a relapse into civil war [**SAMEWAR=0; DATESAME=n.r.; ANYWAR=0; DATEANY=n.r.**]. The months of peace amount to 252 [**PEACMON1=252; PEACMON2=252**].

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