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Civil Patrols, Race, and Repression in Guatemala, 1982-1996

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Honors Thesis
This thesis analyzes the creation and maintenance of the civil patrol system during the Guatemalan counterinsurgency between 1982 and 1996.\(^1\) Civil patrols emerged as an iteration of paternalism of the Ladino state towards Maya populations coded as “rebellious” and “subversive.”\(^2\) The violence of militarization and patrol formation was intended destroy community organizing and any autonomy from the state and military. The violence occurred in the context of intense racism and racial inequality, and the counterinsurgency, in certain cases, employed genocide to achieve its ends of population control.

The Guatemalan civil war, waged between 1960 and 1996, exploded in terms of quantity of violence during 1982 and 1983. During this short period in an unusually long war, the military undertook a massive assault in the Guatemalan highlands against the guerrilla insurgents, as well as the disproportionately Maya and rural population itself. It defined anyone who resisted the counterinsurgency as “subversive,” thus creating an ideological basis for an internal assault against its own population.

Using fear and acts of horrific violence to coerce rural Guatemalans, the military fostered dramatic changes to rural life while attacking its inhabitants. Counterinsurgency strategies adopted in 1982 focused not only on attacking the rural population, but also on regimenting the life of rural Guatemalans under military-controlled structures. In doing so the military assaulted

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\(^1\) Formal names for the civil patrols include the Patrol of Self-Defense (PACs by their Spanish acronym), the Voluntary Committees of Self-Defense (CVDC), used post-1985, and the Committees of Peace and Development, a label that became more common in the 1990s.

\(^2\) I use “Maya” as opposed to “Mayan” unless quotation used the latter. I have seen both used, but prefer “Maya” as it is closer to Spanish; Ladino is a racial identity specific to Guatemala. For the purpose of this analysis it indicates non-Maya identity, and can be considered a form of whiteness.
any organized resistance as well as cooperation with guerrillas. The most effective and significant mechanism of injecting military control onto the local level was the civil patrol system.

This thesis focuses on the creation of civil patrols (also known as PACs by their Spanish acronym) and their maintenance until the end of the war in 1996. During this period, the civil patrols reified racial inequalities between Mayas and Ladinos. Perhaps most importantly, patrols as an institution were used by the military to destroy civil organization, allowing the military to maintain its dominance over rural society. The civil patrol system was based in an assertion of partnership between rural communities and the military. It was alleged that the rural population supported the counterinsurgency because so many patrolled. Thus, by forcing participation, the Guatemalan counterinsurgency state shrouded responsibilities for the violence that marked the post-1981 period. This thesis addresses the general issues of a) how and why patrols were created and b) how and why patrols were maintained until 1996. The desire of the Guatemalan military to control as much of the rural population as possible, and the system’s benefits to certain members of affected communities explain its successful creation and maintenance.

This analysis employs the framework laid out by Elizabeth Oglesby and Amy Ross to demonstrate that the areas of most intense counterinsurgency violence occurred in areas of the most intense historical Maya organizing. As their analysis of the findings of the Historical Clarification Commission (the CEH by its Spanish acronym) demonstrated, “The army was not simply killing Mayans; it was killing Mayans in particular places where social organizing was
The civil patrol system functioned to control the movement and political networks of rural, mostly Maya, Guatemalans. The military constructed an identity of the Maya population of the highlands as in need of militarized control and political reorientation. The civil patrol system was born out of a paternalistic desire to end opposition to the Guatemalan state and military among the Maya population while promoting nationalism and militarization. Simultaneously, the civil patrol system was tactically effective, dramatically limiting the capacity of inhabitants of rural Guatemala to make contact and plan with guerrillas.

Tracing the connection between the abstract racial thinking of military planners and the concrete implementation of the civil patrol system helps explain the incredible scope and brutality of the system. Interviews with and writings of military planners indicate a clear desire to place the Maya population under their institutional control. The effects of paternalism within counterinsurgency are evident in practically every sector and level of Guatemalan society. Furthermore, the consolidation of the system in many communities was based around already-present racial asymmetries between Mayas and Ladinos.

Virtually any resistance to patrol formation and militarization was met with repression. During the peak of violence in 1982 and 1983, the only communities capable of escaping patrol formation were larger and relatively middle-class. By 1985, 1.3 million, or nearly 16% of the

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5 One notable community that avoided patrol formation was the town of Cantel, Quetzaltenango. Cantel was a town with a larger middle class which had a heavy presence of missionaries during the previous several decades who helped create relatively vibrant civil society networks in the town. Furthermore, Cantel was integrated into the large economy centered in Quetzaltenango, a city spared from patrolling on account of its size and middle-class status. For these and other reasons Cantel avoided a patrol. For more on this history of the anti-patrol protest in Cantel, see
Guatemalan population patrolled. Not until the introduction of nominal democracy in 1986 and the quantitative decrease of violence that followed did protest against patrols and militarization become feasible. Military strategy allowed for the re-emergence of rural civil society in the late 1980s, precisely because of the supposed success of the counterinsurgency. The most notable group and a focus of this thesis was the Council of Ethnic Communities of Runujel Junam (K’iche’ for “Everyone is Equal”), or CERJ. It advocated abolishing patrols, and combined this demand with broader ones for human rights, highlighting the need for constitutional education and recognition of Maya ethnic rights. Their activism, indicative of the general tenor of Maya-led activism in the late-1980s, directly countered the paternalism and racial thinking of the military. CERJ, by insisting that new constitutional protections and rule of law should apply to Mayas in the countryside, countered the counterinsurgency process of forced incorporation into the Guatemalan nation of Mayas and rural communities. CERJ’s history is a vehicle for understanding how rural Guatemalans understood militarization and the political changes wrought by the counterinsurgency. Examining their struggle provides a window into the dynamics of violence, paternalism, and their legacies.

This thesis concludes by highlighting the legacy of violence and patrolling that followed the end of the war in 1996 and the demobilization of the patrol system as a whole. While the civil patrol system formally ended with the signing of the Peace Accords, the social dislocation caused by the destruction of non-military organization effected new patterns of violence. Maya and rural communities had been occupied, restructured by violent means, and left with few

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democratic internal mechanisms for governance. The post-war phenomena of lynching and the persistent social power and political power of many ex-patrollers yield further evidence of the dislocations caused by military violence. The military, by assaulting organizing in rural Guatemala with extreme tenacity, placed those communities in a state of disarray during and after the war.

**Literature Review**

While many secondary works on the Guatemalan civil war mention the civil patrols, relatively few of these works treat the patrols as a central part of their analysis. Several works, however, expound significantly on the place of the civil patrol system within the counterinsurgency, and the realities of how they operated. Many other secondary sources were employed in this thesis, but those below most centrally provided frameworks for the analysis of the civil patrol system.

Along this vein, Jennifer Schirmer’s *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy*, is one of the most invaluable secondary sources employed in this thesis. This work seeks to map out the various components of the counterinsurgency and its ideological underpinnings, with a focus on the origins of and racial ideologies that surrounded the civil patrol system. Furthermore, this work contains extensive interviews with major planners behind the counterinsurgency and the civil patrol system, chief among them General Hector Gramajo Morales. Schirmer describes how the military “project” extended its power through a civilian-led state and a militarized countryside. A familiarity with that military project is essential to understanding the nature of the civil patrol system. This thesis uses Schirmer’s research and
analyses of interviews to contextualize the civil patrol system within the greater political system of the 1980s and 1990s.

Paul Kobrak’s PhD dissertation, “Village Troubles: The Civil Patrols of Aguacantán, Guatemala” is one of the most in-depth studies of the history of a specific region’s civil patrols. His study focuses on the case of Aguacatán, Huehuetenango. This work is valuable for its fine-tuned depictions of the creation and maintenance of civil patrols, as well as its general explication of the military planning and justification for patrols as a tactic. Kobrak’s work demonstrates not only how affected communities grappled with the dangerous situation of militarization, but how the implementation and maintenance of the civil patrol system was steeped in racism and the influence of National Security Doctrine. Together these influences threatened to define any Maya man or heavily-Maya community who refused to patrol as “subversive”.

The America Watch reports, Civil Patrols in Guatemala and CERJ: Prosecuting Human Rights Monitors, from 1986 and 1989 respectively, provide detailed and essential information on the creation, maintenance and use of civil patrols. The report from 1986, outlines how civil patrols were used as instruments of repression, while detailing the intense violence and coercion with which they were formed. It also details the basic conditions of patrolling and how such a repressive institution changed every aspect of community life. The latter report details the
activist reaction to militarization and civil patrols which emerged in the late 1980s. By examining the organization most focused on ending patrols, CERJ, it provides a general context for the human rights situation in the countryside following the most violent years of the counterinsurgency, and the efforts of re-emerging civil organizations to reverse its consequences. In particular, the 1989 report grounds chapter 3, which focuses on CERJ’s formulation of anti-patrol organizing.

Finally, in order to solidify the point that the creation of the civil patrol system was explicitly about controlling areas of heavy Maya organizing, the analysis of Elizabeth Oglesby and Amy Ross in their article “Guatemala’s Genocide Determination and the Spatial Politics of Justice,” is immensely valuable. As mentioned earlier, Oglesby and Ross argue that the counterinsurgency targeted most directly areas in which resided (mostly Maya) populations which had historically organized in opposition to the state. As will be discussed, these populations were identified by military planners as notably “rebellious” and in need of direct governance aimed at reshaping their communal relationship with the state and military. Oglesby and Ross tie state violence to racist efforts to wipe out resistance. This thesis applies that reasoning to the civil patrols by analyzing how the civil patrol system was crafted as a tool for reshaping rural, military and state relations on military terms.

Chapter 1: Ideology, Functions and Formation of Civil Patrols

The civil patrol system was established as a way of institutionalizing military power at the level of the town, village or community. This section provides a general overview and chronology of the civil patrol system, from its creation in 1981 to the early 1990s. Beginning in
1981, the Guatemalan military carried out an expanded form of counterinsurgency directed at guerrilla armies who were gaining a base of support in the Western highlands, and at the highland population itself. By defining any individual or community with a history of organizing against the Guatemalan state as “subversive”, the military justified violence that caused the deaths of over 200,000 Guatemalans, with casualties being disproportionately Maya. According to the CEH, in the Ixil region of Guatemala, 14.5% of the population was killed during the conflict. In Rabinal, the figure was 14.6%; in northern Huehuetenango it was 3.6%; in the Zacualpa areas it was 8.6%. In the Ixil, 97.5% of violations were committed against Mayas; in northern Huehuetenango 99.3%; in Rabinal 98.8%; and in Zacualpa 98.4%. By the same source, Mayas made up 83% of overall casualties during the Guatemalan civil war. The military, civil patrols and other paramilitary forces were deemed responsible for 93% of human rights abuses.

Simultaneous to the intense violence of the early 1980s, the military institutionalized its own power in the countryside. The civil patrols and a “model village” system were methods of counterinsurgent population control that forced those in the affected areas to participate in the militarization of their own communities. Civil patrols were forced to augment regular troops and provide a buffer between army troops and guerrillas. Furthermore, patrollers were forced to report anyone in their communities suspected of guerrilla affiliation. Most significantly and ominously, the military directly forced patrols to take part in massacres and violence. By forcing

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7 Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH), *Memoria del Silencio*, (Guatemala City: CEH, 1999), 359-362.
civil patrollers to oppose and destroy civil organization, the military used counterinsurgency to manufacture the socio-political conditions that favored its power in the countryside.

Model villages were created when the army rounded-up survivors of massacres and relocated them to militarized communities. 10 Their aim, and that of analogous Poles of Development, was to place mainly Maya populations under direct army control. In these militarized communities inhabitants were often put in re-education camps and forced to form civil patrols. 11 The populations considered the most “subversive,” such as the Ixiles in the Ixil Triangle, were disproportionately subject to model villages, while virtually every community in the rural highland region at least had a patrol by 1985. Because of the widespread character of civil patrols, they provide an incisive vehicle of analysis for the general treatment of the rural population during the post-1981 counterinsurgency.

Begun in 1981 under the government of Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia (1978-1982), the first civil patrols served as prototypes for the system before it was dramatically expanded in 1982. 12 Before 1982, guerrillas moved with some freedom throughout much of rural Guatemala, with access to many communities where they recruited and attempted to persuade inhabitants to join their ranks or support their efforts. 13 In 1982, the military incorporated the patrol obligation into the counterinsurgency fully, when it forced nearly every adult male in targeted communities to form and maintain a patrol. 14 The more conflictive the zone, the stronger the patrol network

11 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 69.
12 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 83.
14 At times women, and men or boys as young as 8 and as old as 70 were required to patrol as well. Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 26.
Duties included surveillance, making rounds, augmenting regular forces, and participating in violence and battles. The large majority of those forced to patrol were Maya men; Ladinos were subject as well but avoided the obligation with more flexibility. Civil patrols were formed in nearly all of rural Guatemala. Only large urban centers such as Quetzaltenango and Rabinal were ultimately excluded from patrol obligations, for factors related to size and economic status.

Depending on the available manpower in a given community, patrols were expected to give extremely strenuous commitments. For instance, while an individual was patrolling they could not farm, participate in the harvest, or spend time with children. A patroller might have been expected to carry a wooden gun spray-painted black to trick any guerrillas into thinking the patrollers were armed, making it more likely that they would be shot. There were so many patrollers in Guatemala in the 1980s that some full soldiers joked they could all just go on vacation. The creation of the patrol system forced anyone who did not agree with the military to keep quiet or get out of town. Some towns lost as many as 50% of their inhabitants to exile, as those fleeing did not know if the military would wipe out their entire community because of vague suspicions of opposition and “subversion.”

Massacres and other forms of violence, actual or threatened, were used to make it clear to community members that a patrol would be formed to indicate ideological proximity to the

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16 Typically, Ladinos had considerable leeway in leaving patrols when Mayas did not, demonstrating the racial asymmetry of military pressures on communities. Kobrak, “Village Troubles,” 224.
17 Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols*, iii.
military and Guatemalan state. One patroller describes how because of his travels for his church from 1980 on, he was aware of massacres happening all over the western highlands; he spoke of how in community after community the military destroyed infrastructure and killed people, and how patrols were being forced to kill members of their communities:

[the army] came to the school and collected all of us from the civil patrol….they chose seven between us that were there and ordered us to kill those seven with just sticks and machetes. “If you all don’t kill them, it’s because you are with those who are guerrillas, those [guerrillas] that are among you.” But in reality we knew them, we knew they were our brothers, our countrymen, some were of our religion. It hurt us, we couldn’t keep killing our own people.¹⁹

In one instance soldiers reportedly stood behind forcibly inducted civil patrollers and ordered them to kill captives with ineffective weapons that resulted in gruesome and slow deaths. In the same case it was reportedly said to them “you can kill or you can be killed.”²⁰ This phrase encapsulates the dilemma faced by many patrollers and their communities.

In these ways, the civil patrols became a widespread and coercive feature of rural society between March 1982 and 1985.²¹ Due to the coercive nature of the obligation and the abuses committed by patrols, their existence inspired a massive outcry from human rights monitors within and outside Guatemala. Most civil society organizations that addressed consequences of state violence mentioned civil patrols as a major source of human rights abuses, and one of the major obstacles to rule of law, democracy, and personal security for all Guatemalans. Those civil

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²⁰ Americas Watch, Civil Patrolls, 63.
²¹ Americas Watch, Civil Patrolls, 2-7.
society organizations recognized civil patrols as a critical part of a system of violence and coercion that drove authoritarianism, inequality, and militarization in Guatemala.

At its peak in 1985, the civil patrol system included over a million Guatemalans, out of a population of roughly 7.9 million.\textsuperscript{22} This system of control was remarkable and novel in the history of Guatemala, perhaps representing “the first effective, government-controlled hierarchy in highland villages since the colonial Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{23} Many patrols and patrollers identified as pro-military, and leveraged their positions to increase their personal power. At the same time, many resisted and were thoroughly dissatisfied with the obligation, strategizing about how and when they might leave the patrol without inviting the wrath of the military. In fact, a few communities successfully disbanded or resisted patrols entirely, even during the peaks of violence. Ultimately, however, the scope of the system prevents hard-and-fast generalizations about patrollers.

**Race and Counterinsurgency Planning**

The patrol system was a brutally effective method of institutionalizing military power at the most local levels of rural life, and created a climate where virtually everyone had to navigate paramilitary and military power. This militarization of rural life was a major instigator of impunity following 1982. Such a powerful system both incentivized the local maintenance of the patrols by their members and made the work of human rights and civil organizations to hold them accountable extremely difficult.

\textsuperscript{22} Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols*, 26.  
\textsuperscript{23} Kobrak “Village Troubles,” 157.
In March 1982, with the coup led by José Efraín Ríos Montt, the army outlined the functions of the civil patrols:

(1) to deny access of the subversives to the population which constituted their politico-social support; (2) [to] rescue individuals from the Irregular Local Forces (Fuerzas irregulares locales or FILs), neutralizing or eliminating those who do not want to integrate themselves into normal life; and (3) [to] eliminate the Permanent Military Units [of the subversives].

The military intended for patrols to sever the communicative and spatial links between the guerrillas and the civilian population by creating new militarized and paramilitarized spaces in which anyone who made contact with guerrillas was to be “rescued,” i.e. punished, killed or exiled.

Latent in this spatial separation was the literal desire to change the capacities of members of rural communities; patrols were designed to improve the patroller. An army booklet from 1984 explicated the ideological re-education function of the patrol structure:

The objective is to organize the population civically and politically…so that through the civil defense patrols the persons formerly affected by the subversive groups come to know, study and understand how they were deceived and how to be prepared not to fall again into the same trap.

The Guatemalan army posits that the main reason those in targeted communities organized civically and politically against the state was because they were “deceived” or “engañados.” It presupposed that Mayas could not understand what was at stake in the fight between “democracy” and “international communism.” So, the patrols and re-education camps in model

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24 Ejército de Guatemala, Plan Nacional de seguridad y desarrollo, PNSD-01-82 Guatemala City: CEM 01ABR82 RLHGCC-82, 1982 in Schirmer, The Guatemalan Military Project; FILs were units organized by guerrillas in communities who would fight and supply the guerrillas in the event of full scale war between the guerrilla and army.

villages were methods of forcing an anti-subversion discourse derived from the National Security Doctrine on each rural community. Militaries all throughout Latin America adopted the National Security Doctrine during the Cold War, using it to justify repression against segments of domestic populations identified as “internal enemies.” In the April 1982 Guatemalan National Plan of Security and Development, the military outlined the psychological purpose of the counterinsurgency as

To structure and establish Nationalism, to promote it and foment it in all organisms of the state and spread it through the rural area; assuring that it forms part of the process of formation and education of the population, as a doctrine opposed to international communism.

The Guatemalan Army explicitly cites the need to educate the population, especially the rural population. The civil patrols and model villages were the primary vehicles to carry out this educational program in anti-communism and nationalism. For instance, the Civil Patrol Code of Conduct pushes anti-subversion ideology on patrollers as a central duty, stating that patrollers must never “allow subversion to penetrate [their] community.”

The formal name for the counterinsurgency program of massacres and patrol formation in the highlands was “The Pacification Campaign,” of which “The Beans and the Bullets” and “The 30/70 Plan” were components. “The Pacification Campaign” sought to “separate and isolate the insurgents from the civilian population,” or put otherwise, “to rescue the non-combatant civilian

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26 While it is not the focus of this analysis, the U.S. government was the primary advocate for the adoption of National Security Doctrine by Latin American militaries. The issue of its complicity in subsequent episodes of state violence in Latin America is extremely significant for the study of the Guatemalan civil war; CEH, Memory of Silence, 120.
27 Ejército de Guatemala, Plan Nacional de Seguridad y Desarrollo.
28 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 99.
population.” These programs provided a rubric for army operations in which the army would occupy a community labeled “subversive,” kill roughly 30% of its inhabitants, and resettle them under army control. Civil patrols were a key part of resettlement and control. The “Beans” of the program supposedly involved the army then providing developmental aid to those communities, such as work on irrigation canals or the provision of material to build better houses. It is striking how Orwellian these programs’ names are. The idea of “pacification” entails peace, the opposite of what this program was intended to cause. In practice, “rescuing” the population affected by “subversion” often meant their torture or killing.

The interviews by General Hector Gramajo, the self-proclaimed father of the Pacification Campaign, with Jennifer Schirmer provide insight into how these programs were structured so as to present the military as a positive force in the highlands. Gramajo believed that the military needed a more direct relationship with rural communities:

we [the military] have three objectives… (1) to bring the population down from the mountains (descender la población) (2) recuperate those who have been indoctrinated with foreign ideas, and (3) neutralize the armed insurgents….The Army with guns is here [on one side] and el pueblo is on the other side. So, the Army without guns locate themselves within el pueblo, and el pueblo speaks with the army without guns, [thinking], “They cannot harm me. On the contrary, they help me to develop, they give me medical assistance, education, everything. If the army has to grab (agarrar) some people, it is [already located] there with them.”

Gramajo is referring here to militarization, and references inspiration for the civil patrols. The model is clear: the military had to place itself within communities that have organized or could possibly organize with guerrillas. In practice, it was targeting communities that had historically

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30 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 104.
opposed the Guatemalan state and in which Maya activism had swelled in the 1970s and early 1980s.  

Gramajo was disingenuous in implying that there would be an “Army without Guns,” as militarization was always backed by the threat or use of force. Other officers, however, were more open about the scale of violence used “to rescue” communities in the highlands, and the intent with which organized violence was practiced. An intelligence colonel put it as such:

“All, everyone was a guerrilla; no difference was made in killing them. The big difference [in the shift in strategy after the 1982 coup] was that we couldn’t eliminate them all.”

When the statements of the intelligence colonel and Gramajo are analyzed together, their model of counterinsurgency becomes clearer: the army was to establish a presence within communities that were considered more-or-less “guerrilla” communities. The major difference between the pre- and post-1982 tactics was the concentration of intense violence and militarization on rural communities and the use of post-violence development, or the “beans” of the “Beans and Bullets.” With regards to “the beans” of the Beans and Bullets program of counterinsurgency, Gramajo claimed that

[to refugees in Chimaltenango] Colonel Getella said to them “we aren’t fighting you we are fighting the subversivos.” And they said, “Give us food.” But we didn’t give them food because that is not our obligation. We said, “Go back to your village, take out the food you have hidden and grow your crops”….So the indígenas went back to their villages ….We drew them out of hiding with the Beans.

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33 CEH, *Memory of Silence*, 34.
In the early 1980s individuals increasingly picked up and fled into the jungles or mountainous areas of the highlands. For instance, the Communities of Populations in Resistance, or CPRs, were groups of internal refugees that refused to submit to militarized life under the counterinsurgency, and as such were prime targets for constant military violence. The point stressed by Gramajo above is that “indígenas” had to be taught not to fear the military, a force that could help them lead more productive and sustainable lives. However, the military conduct of the early- to mid-1980s bore no resemblance to the scene described by Gramajo. Perhaps this scenario did happen in Chimaltenango, but it is not what happened in the cases of over 626 massacres of communities in the highlands recorded by the CEH. Those 626 cases involved the partial or entire destruction of communities. Gramajo’s statement that “beans” were used to coax Mayas out from hiding is false in the case of the Ixil in particular. As far as counterinsurgency strategy was practiced, Ixil identity was synonymous with subversion. The Army General Staff and garrison headquarters had drawing boards in which each community in the highlands had a red, pink or white pin. Red meant that every member of the community was to be treated as a subversive; all communities in the Ixil were marked red, and were to be razed; pink meant it would be targeted but not razed, white meant it was to be generally spared. In the Ixil, only communities “dominated by Ladinos” were spared. The statistics mentioned on page 8 indicate that over roughly 15% of the population of the Ixil and Rabinal areas were killed or died during the counterinsurgency, primarily at the hands of the military, paramilitaries and patrols; the

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35 CEH, Memory of Silence, 34.
36 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 56
inhabitants of rural Guatemalan had plenty of reasons to hide from the military if they could. When Gramajo says that it was not the obligation of the army to give the refugees food, he means he was allowing them to improve themselves in a space freed by the army from “subversion.” It was a form of aid that involved sometimes putting patrollers and other community members into forced labor to complete projects like canals or roads, oftentimes for the benefit of a nearby finca (plantation) or military base. This also meant that when civil patrols were formed they often had to pay for their own guns, and they had to patrol without wages. This meant that when “development” was offered (“beans”), patrols often functioned as work gangs to carry out those projects.

The treatment of the Ixil population is highly instructive for understanding the use of “beans” of the Beans and Bullets program. As mentioned earlier, the populations of the Ixil and Rabinal areas were prime targets for military violence. The Ixil were identified as a notably “rebellious” population going back to the 19th century. The targeting of the Ixil population in northern El Quiché formally began in 1982. As the CIA put it: “The well documented belief by the army that the entire Ixil population is pro-EGP (a guerrilla army, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor) has created a situation in which the army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike.” The CIA was correct in its assertion that the Guatemalan military identified virtually the entire Ixil population as subversive. Because their identities were equated

38 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 73-75.
39 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 28-29.
40 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 91.
with subversion, the patrol system and other aspects of counterinsurgency were designed first-and-foremost with the goal controlling Maya populations such as the Ixil.

Concern over the affinity of the Ixil and Maya peoples for the government of Guatemala emerged out of decades, if not centuries, of prejudices against Mayas that assumed a need to assimilate them to Ladino culture and society in order for those Mayas to become full and productive citizens. An updated theory of nationalistic assimilation appeared in an article called “Operation Ixil” in the military publication Revista Militar. Juan Cifuentes proposed that the military either accelerate the ladinization of the Ixil population or partner with the military against the guerrillas:

[the army should work to] complete its assigned mission [of] intensifying the ladinization of the Ixil population until it disappears… [thus] the Ixils would stop thinking as they do and accept all the abstractions that constitute nationality, patriotism, etc.

The author Cifuentes on one hand proposes the elimination of Ixiles as a group by way of cultural pressure by the military. He proposed ethnocide, i.e. the destruction of Ixil culture, but not necessarily of people. However, Cifuentes does not see this as viable, because “For the last 400 years, the Ixiles, more than any other ethnic group, have resisted la castellanizacion [hispanicization].” In this way Cifuentes marks the evolution of Guatemalan racism and paternalism from earlier beliefs that mestizaje would redeem the Maya population. Rather, he postulated that the military could instead use military service to induce an identity with the Guatemalan nation in the Ixil people. Rather, he called for a policy of

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43 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 104.
44 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 104.
respecting the Ixil identity, customs and language, giving them the opportunity to contribute, together with the army, to the defense of their communities…. Knowing the history of the Ixiles, this would be the only way to convince them to be part of the great Guatemalan nation.\textsuperscript{45}

In reality, a fusion of these two policies, of assaulting Maya culture and forcing military service on Mayas, would form the basis of the patrol system. On one hand, the patrol system and other forms of militarization destroyed social organizations within many rural and Maya communities, assaulting distinctly Maya cultural patterns of organization.\textsuperscript{46} On the other hand, the creation of patrols in Maya communities gave the military a direct vehicle to push nationalistic, anti-communist and pro-military ideologies in Maya communities. Military strategists argued that communities were being respected by being given a role to play in the national effort against guerrillas. In this way, the civil patrol system was born out of desires to control and culturally alter the Maya population.

In 1984, after the peak of state violence, in a pamphlet called “the Civil Patrols of Self-Defense: the popular response to the process of political-socioeconomic integration in Contemporary Guatemala,” the military outlined why it had had to carry out the counterinsurgency in a way that disproportionately targeted Mayas. The Army’s historical analysis shows that it used civil patrols to shut down the high degree oppositional organizing among Mayas. In this pamphlet the army blamed the sectors of Maya population for the popularity of guerrillas between 1978-1982:

In Guatemala, the several groups of subversive delinquents who were active at that time, achieved a certain degree of effectiveness during 1980 and 1981…. [because] large sectors of the country, but especially sectors of the indian

\textsuperscript{46} CEH, \textit{Memory of Silence}, 29-30.
population, offered their backing [to the guerrillas] even though most of the time this backing was obtained under coercive force [of the guerrillas].

The relative degree of effectiveness obtained by the above-mentioned groups was possible due to the presence of … a) … the generalized level of underdevelopment [of the Maya population] … b) By the introduction - in rural towns - of new forms of social organizations without any kind of supervision or any kind of control [my emphasis], specifically taking into consideration that the Indian population were not in capacity of managing by themselves those new forms of social, political and economic organization; c) by the ideological principles (conscientious or political) that some religious activists - both from Protestant as well as Catholic churches- preached to the peasants so that they, with new ideas and religious principles backed by the authority of the preachers, would reject the bases of a democratic system and accept the teachings of other systems, totalitarian and anti-democratic.

This was specifically a historical explanation for the necessity of the civil patrols. First, because organizations like Catholic Action, the Jesuits, and Maryknoll affiliates, among others, pushed for education, cooperative agriculture and catechist-training in the 1960s and 1970s, Maya minds had been filled with “foreign” ideas which they could not really understand. Mayas had been led to conclusions by those groups that drove and emboldened Maya opposition to the Guatemalan state. Civil patrols and militarization would allow the military to intervene directly, and would forcibly help the Mayas to accept an anti-communist Guatemalan identity. This is the same kind of paternalism demonstrated by the Revista Militar article on Operation Ixil, in which by some means the military felt it necessary to intervene in Ixil communities in order to transform their inhabitants, literally, into “real” Guatemalans. This supposed wayward turn of the Maya population was what allowed the guerrillas to convince them of the need for armed

47 Ejército de Guatemala, Las patrullas de autodefensa civil: la respuesta popular al proceso de integración socio económico-político en la Guatemala actual, in Kobrak, "Village Troubles," 104.
48 For a detailed history of Maya activism during the civil war, see Betsy Konefal, For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960-1990 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).
struggle against the state. According to the military and many Ladinos, Mayas needed the reglementation of the civil patrol system. If this is not clear from the above pamphlet excerpt, Captain Juan Godinez makes it clear in comparing the differences between the counterinsurgency of the late-1960s and the early 1980s:

> It began in Oriente. But the people there are smarter, more awake. There was no fertile ground like with the indigenous people [in the western highlands]. So the bad ones searched out the indigenous people… You offer them a piece of candy and you have them for the rest of their lives … [The guerrillas] offered them land, but gave them death. 49

Again, the writer cites the fact that Mayas had failed to show restraint from supporting the guerrillas that Ladinos had supposedly shown in the late 1960s. As will be discussed more in depth in chapter 3, Ladinos often thought of Mayas as more a part of nature than of humanity, a prejudice which Maya organizations often fought (and continue to fight) against. Literally another name that has been used for Mayas in Guatemala is naturales, or the natural ones. Comparing these ethnic groups to campo fertil or fertile ground is for this reason conspicuous. Similarly, “offering them candy” is reminiscent of the childlike treatment of Mayas by many Ladinos and the national state. The military very consciously based the civil patrol system in this racist ideology and the regard of Mayas as natural elements to be, as Gramajo put it, “forged”:

> To forge, you understand, refers to what a blacksmith does to make horseshoes. So we must forge el pueblo to force it to study, forge it to excel. That is, we in Civil Affairs don’t give anything away [free]; el pueblo must earn everything [it receives]. There is no paternalism [involved]. But when they forge themselves, they do so by themselves, they are going to be free, they are going to have an education, they are going to have economic resources, but they will not be given

anything free. Civil Affairs will induce them, will show them the way to forge themselves.\textsuperscript{50}

The military saw itself as a parent raising a child, a blacksmith forging horseshoes from raw natural materials. The coercion that guided the civil patrol system is not reducible to racism against Mayas; Ladinos were forced into patrols as well. Rather, the grafting of National Security Doctrine and such a wide-encompassing label of subversive onto a system of intense anti-Maya racism provides an explanation for the brutality of the counterinsurgency and the civil patrol system, and perhaps instructs as to how acts of genocide were committed. In other words, the genocide of the 1982-1983 period was a product of forces specific to both the Cold War and to anti-Maya racism, forged over centuries and featuring the political, social and economic domination of Mayas by colonial and republican authorities. Racism was a design features of the counterinsurgency.

**Instances of Patrol Formation**

Even before the counterinsurgency, racism was a reality of everyday life in the countryside. Most municipalities in the countryside took the form of a central larger community dominated commercially by Ladinos with surrounding smaller communities of mostly Mayas. Outlying smaller communities experienced intense repression and violence from the military.\textsuperscript{51}

Simone Remjinse’s studies of the Joyabaj municipality in the department of southern El Quiché offer an insightful look into the dynamics of racial fears among Ladinos in the early 1980s. What

\textsuperscript{50} Civil affairs is defined as a military sector responsible for cooperation with “civil authorities and the general population to...prevent and resolve the problems derived from underdevelopment and actions of terrorist groups,” Schirmer, *Guatemalan Military Project*, 103, 114.

emerges is that not only the military, but also many local Ladinos were wary of increased organizing by Mayas in the 1970s and early 1980s. In Joyabaj, as in many other municipalities, Simone Remijnse noted that “[Ladinos] have always felt threatened by an indigenous majority, resulting in sometimes open racism.” These racial fears became more acute in the early 1980s, so much so that “Some Ladinos expressed fears of an indigenous majority literally flooding down the mountain, demanding their rights, and intent on killing every Ladino in sight.”

The military formally began its intervention in Joyabaj when guerrillas assassinated a powerful Ladino Joyabateco. One Ladino inhabitant recounts how in this case the formation of a PAC was viewed in a relatively positive light:

> From the beginning they thought that the guerrillas were communists and that …. they would take their houses from them, their women…the people were afraid of this … most of all the Ladino people. And when the PAC came in, they thought they [the patrol] were going to defend their houses, their families.

However, in Joyabaj and elsewhere around the highlands, Ladinos also had to form and join their own patrols or multiethnic patrols. This is not to imply that all Ladinos benefitted from patrol formation, but rather that when individuals took advantage of militarization, they were disproportionately Ladino. A major difference was, as in the case of Uspantán, that “[although the Ladinos had petitioned for the patrol, they were the least available [for service].]” He elaborated that

> There have been cases where a Ladino doesn’t feel like going out to patrol and he tells the Indian to cover for him, but when an Indian does the same with a Ladino

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54 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 36.
leader ... [the Ladino] tells the [military base] that so-and-so did not patrol and the [base] arrests that person. 55

Ladino privilege with respect to militarization and patrol formation went beyond petitioning for patrol formation. Patrol heads or jefes were disproportionately Ladino, and jefes were the actors who usually benefitted most from corruption and patrol violence, while being singled out more often by human rights and civil society publications. 56 A general trend is clear. Ladinos benefitted from militarization relatively more than did Mayas by virtue of the design and implementation of the counterinsurgency, which indexed Maya identity to subversion and promoted many Ladinos to positions of military and paramilitary authority over Mayas. Thus, while Ladinos suffered because of state and patrol violence, and many Mayas carried out that violence, racial asymmetries in authority were exacerbated by militarization.

The counterinsurgency and the civil patrol system were constructed in such a way as to normalize militarization in the countryside. The military and the state justified the coercive mechanisms put in place by asserting popular support for civil patrols. The military explicitly aimed to coerce and control the Maya population, justifying such actions with paternalistic ideas about the need to save Mayas from subversion and communism while incorporating them into the Guatemalan nation as full citizens. The military and Guatemalan state, for instance, used this logic to convince their U.S. allies that human rights abuses against the rural and Maya populations were not cause for alarm. In a cable from the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala to

55 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 36.
56 For an overview of human rights abuses and civil patrols during the 1990s, see Margaret L. Popkin, The Civil Patrols and Their Legacy: Overcoming Militarization and Polarization in the Guatemalan Countryside, (Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights: 1996); Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 33-43.
Secretary of State George Schultz, the Ambassador embraced the reasoning of the military-controlled state on the issue of civil patrols:

If the GOG [government of Guatemala] were indeed engaged in massive extrajudicial executions -- a “mad, genocidal” campaign -- in the highlands, one must wonder why the Indians are joining the civil defense patrols in great numbers, and why thousands of indians are coming to the army for refuge in such places as Nebaj, Choatulum, and San Martin Jilotepeque.57

Many members of the U.S. government were convinced of the military government line that civil patrols were a popular response. Many American government officials and reporters were convinced by the military assertion that militarization was “popular.”58 Thus, Mayas were “seeking refuge” in places like Nebaj, rather than being forced into model villages in those places. Militarization was sold as a “popular response” in the face of guerrilla violence, a logic international and domestic supporters of the Guatemalan military and state were eager to accept.

Construing civil patrol service as “popular” was another key design feature of the counterinsurgency that worked in conjunction with its paternalism. Gramajo had made it clear that while the civil patrols were to serve tactically as a force multiplier for the regular military forces, a key aspect and word of this new counterinsurgency strategy was “‘Participation,’ because the indígenas participated in the war effort!”59 Forcing the Maya population to participate could be, and was construed as legitimating the counterinsurgency among the most marginalized sectors of the population. In reality, almost every pattern of patrol formation shows

59 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 91.
that patrols were not purely popular responses. At times they were organized by communities without direct military intervention, but they were always organized with the lingering threat of state violence and imminent destruction. The general patterns of patrol formation were extremely violent and coercive, and the popular response advertised by the army pamphlet (the title of which called civil patrols a “popular response”) was merely a front for public relations purposes.

Accounts by reporters and human rights organizations make it clear that the “popular” aspect of the patrol system was a tool to obscure the military coercion. The case of patrol formation in Parraxtut, El Quiché in on December 22 and 23, 1982, is instructive. In this instance, the military herded together men from a neighboring community of Chiul, between 15 and 65 years old, after which an army captain reportedly asked those herded, “Do you have the balls?” When they answered affirmatively, the military formed them into a new civil patrol and took them to Parraxtut. It ordered them to fire on Parraxtut’s inhabitants after the captain reportedly declared, “Now you’re going to show me that you have them. You’re going to kill each and every one of these guerrillas.” All-in-all 350 were killed. The reporter went on by noting that the civil patrol system and counterinsurgency are “part of a massive and brutal attempt to uproot and destroy the centuries-old communities of Guatemala’s indigenous population. It is no longer possible to speak of Guatemala without speaking of ethnocide.” The reporter added that “the civil patrols are nothing less than a savage and intentional destruction of the individuals - both those who are forced to do the shooting and their neighbors who they are

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60 Kобрак, "Village Troubles," 151-152.
forced to shoot.”\textsuperscript{61} He noted that the violence of patrol induction was about destroying the identity of the patroller with their community so as to break them psychologically.

Even when patrol formation was presented to communities as an “option,” the psychological damage of militarization was profound. According to many observers, communities responded with profound anger against the racism of the invading army.

Anthropologist Sheldon Davis reported that in Huehuetenango,

I sensed that many of [the Maya] that I interviewed had internalized a large amount of guilt and shame as a result of their participation in the civil patrol system. Such guilt was aroused because the army entered the Indian towns as if it were an angry father and accused the Indians of being rebellious children responsible for the civil damage and strife the guerrilla movement had created. Formation of the civil patrols, I believe, was presented to the Indian population as a way of extricating itself from any association with the guerrillas.\textsuperscript{62}

When the military went into a community and demanded patrol formation, its inhabitants had to evaluate many different dilemmas. Maya communities often perceived the military as acting in a racist and paternalistic manner, thus exacerbating dislike of the civil patrol obligation. However, these communities had to consider the prospect of survival and their own powerlessness against a well-equipped force.

The pattern of the military demanding patrol formation while threatening or committing acts of violence was not always as violent as in the case of Parraxtut or the Ixil region. If a community resisted forming a patrol, or patrollers were trying to withdraw from the system, a

steady stream of violence and intimidation was used to maintain the pressure for patrol formation. In Chichicastenango in 1982, one peasant described how

We were all called together for a big meeting in a field; there was no way you could not attend - if you didn’t show up, your name was put on a list….The commander talked to us. He said… “do you agree to stop burning trucks and buildings and painting walls?” And the people said “Yes!” “And second, do you agree to defend Guatemala?” The people said yes again. “We have to get rid of all these subversives,” he said. “The truth is that among you all there are subversives. If you don’t want to be kidnapped tomorrow, form your group….,”

The people said that they would “stop doing these things” and that they would defend Guatemala because they knew that if they didn’t say, “yes, yes” they would be seen as subversives.

Another peasant from Aguacatán, Huehuetenango stated how a similar group was asked by a commander “are you in agreement [to form a patrol] or do you want the guerrillas to come?” These examples show that not only was patrol formation far from a popular response, but that it was a vehicle to spread Guatemalan nationalism and subversion discourse. In other words, it was a vehicle for both transforming the relation between the military, state and rural population, and for indoctrination.

People formed and accepted patrols for many reasons. They might be scared of the military, scared of the guerrillas, incentivized over promises of development, incentivized over the promise of increased personal power and prestige, or perhaps genuinely indoctrinated. This is not to say that patrollers or the communities that accepted them were purely brainwashed, but the ideological conditioning of the military was carried out in an atmosphere of intense violence for many years. As Sheldon Davis noted above, many communities in Huehuetenango were furious

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63 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 22.
64 Americas Watch, Civil Patrols, 22.
with the paternalism of the military when it occupied their communities. Even if a community formed a patrol pre-emptively to indicate that it was pro-military, it was likely done out of intense fear and in the context of Maya-Ladino inequality. Furthermore, it was carried out paternalistically. One teacher in a re-education camp stated that “We have to work them [the Maya], to raise their consciousness. Our work is like erasing an old cassette tape and recording something new. We have to start with them like little children.” Of course, many were performing complex calculations over how to improve their lives, their positions, and how to stave off violence. The use of military discourses to justify the actions of many communities and patrols was a sign of adaptability to new dangers, rather than the blind acceptance of military theories and directives. That many rural Guatemalans became more nationalist, anti-communist, and pro-military is not surprising. This ideological aspect of patrol formation proved a major obstacle for human rights organizations working in the late 1980s and 1990s, to be further discussed in chapter 3.

Patrollers and their communities had other ample reasons to align with the military. As demonstrated by many accounts of patrol formation and activity, patrollers were required to participate directly in violence. This might have been with soldiers standing at their backs telling them to kill or be killed. Sometimes patrols eager to prove their status as anti-subversive took the initiative (but whose actions were always based in army directives) and reported, captured or killed members of their communities in a partially independent manner. But in almost all cases,

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the military pushed patrollers so that they would “get their hands dirty.”\textsuperscript{66} Many patrollers were wary years later of human rights workers and organizations because they did not want to be blamed for acts they had done in order to survive. As David Stoll argued in the case of Nebaj,

> I detected no interest in systematic punishment of guilty parties [for violence], perhaps because such prosecutions would cast a far wider net than most Nebajeños would like to see….one reason Nebajeños emphasize the external origin of violence in exculpatory, to deflect blame from local men who committed crimes under duress.\textsuperscript{67}

The Americas Watch report from 1986 on the civil patrols made a similar observation, noting that “The result of civil patrols assuming military functions has been predictable: now, when such abuses do occur, the finger is pointed at the civil patrols.”\textsuperscript{68} The same report detailed at length how patrol leaders and other members often used their position to enrich themselves, increase their local power and take advantage of members of their communities.\textsuperscript{69} While many patrollers, especially leaders, committed abuses because of their positions, with roughly 1.3 million people patrolling in 1985 it is impossible to say that so many carried out such actions. To the contrary, for every abusive and pro-military patrol there was likely another that would “go off and listen to Radio Sandino” when the army was not around.\textsuperscript{70} However, with over 16% of the population at one point part of a paramilitary unit at a period of intense state violence, the issue of impunity attained incredible significance and complexity. How would it be possible for

\textsuperscript{66} Stoll, \textit{Between Two Armies}, 107.
\textsuperscript{67} Stoll, \textit{Between Two Armies}, 302.
\textsuperscript{68} America Watch, \textit{Civil Patrols}, 64.
\textsuperscript{69} America Watch, \textit{Civil Patrols}, 34-48.
\textsuperscript{70} Sandino was a Nicaraguan rebel who in the late 1920s and early 1930s fought against U.S. forces occupying Nicaragua. He became the namesake of the Sandinista rebels and party, and a symbol of anti-imperialism and Latin American left-wing thought, comparable to Che Guevara. It was a Nicaraguan-run station during the time of a Sandinista-led government and, thus, risky to listen to; America Watch, \textit{Civil Patrols}, 54.
any organization to ever come along and assign responsibility for abuses committed by patrols or in their presence? Human rights organizations grappled with this for years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as will be examined in chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Civil Patrols, Political Opening and the Civil-Military Project

Between the end of 1984 and 1986, the number of Guatemalans patrolling fell from a high of 1.3 million to 600,000, a decrease of over 50 percent. The system was introduced through an incredible magnitude of violence while it swelled to over 16 percent of the Guatemalan population. Conditions had changed in the countryside that warranted such a dramatic decrease in the number of patrollers. This thesis has argued that patrols were a way for the military to force National Security Doctrine on peasants and Mayas by controlling their organizational activity and providing incentives to accept and bolster military power locally. The massive decrease in the number of patrollers between 1984 and 1986 indicated that the military felt it had gained sufficient control over the highland population. The military organized the introduction of nominal democracy in 1985, which figures within the military believed that the counterinsurgency had been an incredible success. With this success, military power needed to be institutionalized in a state technically headed by civilian leaders but which preserving the military dominance and power. This thinking, along with the fact that the counterinsurgency between 1982 and 1983 had effectively ended the capacity of guerrillas to contend for legitimacy and state power, led the military to pull back the scope of its grip on the countryside. Thus, the

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71 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 91.
military allowed the patrol system to decrease in quantity, while maintaining a core of patrollers that were generally more committed to maintaining militarization in their communities.

The civil patrols maintained many functions following their consolidation between 1983 and 1986. While this analysis cannot cover every aspect of how patrols were used as devices for population control, two themes resonate throughout the history of patrols: their use to limit and destroy civil organizing, and their role as vehicles for ideological instruction. With the backing of the military, civil patrols systematically repressed opposition to militarization; even in cases where patrollers wanted to disband, the duress and coercive nature of the obligation forced them to commit repression. Furthermore, patrols and patrol jefes were incentivized and ideologically conditioned to adopt repressive practices. In an atmosphere of continuing threats, acts and memories of violence, virtually no patrol was completely independent of the military. Civil Patrols were pressed to adopt the anti-communist and nationalistic discourses of Guatemalan National Security Doctrine. Those discourses were used to justify the new militarized social structures in their communities and the repression they were ordered or pushed to commit by the military. The anti-organizing and ideological function of patrols went hand-in-hand. These functions emerged from the violence of their formation and the specific population control function with which the military invested patrols.

The military used the patrols as a way to “cleanse” Maya men of links to subversion through forcing communities to accept the logic that patrol formation and maintenance indicated opposition to guerrillas. The scope of the civil patrol system correlated to the perceived need of the military to control the rural population. In the early 1980s, the military violently expanded
into every sector of rural life, institutionalizing that expansion with model villages, military commissioners and civil patrols. In the eyes of the military, 1982-1983 had been a period of “cleansing” and asserting control. Because the military firmly established its dominance over the state, the countryside, and the guerrillas, subversion was supposedly dramatically reduced. Thus, the patrol system could decline in number. The patrols that remained into the 1990s were notably more pro-military, and believed the system to be the best vehicle for serving their own interests or the interests of their communities in a still tense atmosphere of war. Following the controlled democratic opening, the status of patrols within the military project of normalizing its power became an issue of fierce contention between human rights groups, the military, civilian leadership, and local patrollers themselves.

The military faced a situation between 1984 and 1986 where, following the tactical defeat of the guerrillas in the countryside, counterinsurgency planners used militarization to construct a new relationship between the state, military and rural society. The civil patrols, model villages and Poles of Development were an integral part of tactically defeating the guerrillas. Lieutenant Colonel and political scientist José Luis Cruz Salazar praised the civil patrols as the most integral part of the counterinsurgency;

These PACS - for all the criticisms that one could make of them - have in reality been very effective in combating insurgency. First, because this mobilization implied that it denied necessary information to the guerrilla, and second, it denied the logistical support, transport and so forth, to the guerrilla … From a tactical point of view, the PACs are extraordinary, fantastic! What I am insisting upon is very important because this structure [the civil patrols] now [in 1986] is precisely without conflict because of the tactic [physical exclusion of guerrillas].

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72 Military commissioners were local men chosen by the military to facilitate the relationship between a local base and surrounding communities.

73 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 102.
For Cruz and many other military planners, because the civil patrols restricted guerrilla movement in the countryside, the patrol system had proven an effective force for stability. Because guerrillas represented subversion, by providing the military with the capacity to control rural activity closely, patrols reduced the need for large-scale intimidating violence. By 1986, Cruz recognized that the military could not maintain the “tremendous pressure” it had placed on the peasantry using the patrols and the Poles of Development, stating,

Thus the peasant begins to see that although he was under tremendous pressure by the military, he begins to see a change. Thus, it is a very interesting tactic: *you demand and you give*. You cannot have the Poles without the PACs: they go together … [however] there is an authoritative pressure on the peasant which is indisputable. And this must end or be very much eased up.\(^74\)

The military accurately recognized that the patrol obligation caused considerable duress for the rural population. The excerpts from Gramajo from chapter 1 indicate as much, as when he says that it is not the army’s obligation to feed internal refugees, and that recuperation from violence was to be made their own responsibility. Here, Salazar notes that the decrease in militarization could come after the tools of counterinsurgency have properly instructed peasants in how to work and how to be productive citizens. He is admitting that the patrols and Poles of Development were explicitly designed to force peasants to alter their activity, their thinking, and implicitly the way they organized. In order for the changes that the military had created in the countryside to be institutionalized in the new post-1986 civil-military framework of governance it had designed, it had to naturalize the patrol system as a part of rural society. This was a

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\(^{74}\) Poles of Development were a structure similar to model villages, as mentioned above; Schirmer, *Guatemalan Military Project*, 102.
conscious part of military strategy, rather than a response to pressure from civil society protest.

Cruz Salazar finished his explanation by outlining this institutionalization:

This means that if there is a Pole of Development, the Army has control over the population; it has control over the entire community. One is subjected to a military regime as though one is on a large military base and the peasant is thus totally subject to the will of those who run the Pole. *This must disappear. One must indoctrinate, make the peasant consent to playing a role in helping the government and the Army, but feel free from all pressure.* [my emphasis] This is necessary. This is why one opts for a mixed solution [of civil-military co-governance].

The connection between the draw-down of the patrol system in quantity and the managed transition to nominally democratic civilian rule is key to understanding both processes. In 1983-1984, the Guatemalan military as an institution was at the height of its power after fending off the challenge to its legitimacy from guerrillas, projecting itself into rural communities through civil patrols, model villages and Poles of Development. But, the strategy it had taken to get there was extremely destructive, requiring the creation of a veneer of civilian political institutions. The military drew-down the patrol system because its planners believed the ideological indoctrination carried out in patrols, model villages and Poles of Development was working. By maintaining fewer patrols, where the remaining patrols were more loyal to the military, the military could maintain its power in the countryside while it transferred the burden of governance nationally to civilian leaders. In this way it shielded and fostered its institutional power in the countryside and within the Guatemalan state.

The military pushed this civil-military co-governance in the countryside by also trying to get patrollers to run for or adopt civilian positions in their communities. The military almost

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75 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 102.
always selected the leaders of a patrol, a decision based on his loyalty to the military. Following the end of the most coercive period of counterinsurgency in 1984-1985, the military invested in patrol leaders as the real “first-class” leadership of rural communities. Gramajo insists that the patrols had genuinely become the most talented leaders of rural communities, just as the military was the most competent institution within the state. He states

what had changed [in 1986] was that guns [of the PACs] were no longer present. Some areas continue using guns…. But we have a problem now and I hope we can repair it. When the 1985 elections were being prepared, the local leadership, the real leadership, was in the Civil Patrols because the army had chosen them. When I ordered these Patrol leaders, the true leaders, to renounce their positions if they wanted to participate in politics they, for reasons of team spirit, for camaraderie, for loyalty, I don’t know what, refused to do so. So the first-class leaders are the Patrol leaders, the second- and third-class leaders are mayors who cannot mobilize the population…. In these elections now [December 1990], I don’t know what class of mayor there is; it would be better if those who are in the PACs become mayors and thus continue being leaders, but within the civilian system. Simply stated, military society was more capable than civilian society [in developing leaders].

With the quantitative decrease of the patrols system between 1984 and 1986, and the creation of nominal democracy, Guatemala entered a new political moment in which the military, secure in the legitimacy of the state it had transformed, allowed for more space for civil society and autonomous life in the countryside. Between 1984 and 1988, several large organizations emerged or re-emerged to attempt to organize and combat militarization and repression. The organizing of one group that was most focused on ending the patrol system, CERJ, is the subject of chapter 3. However, this does not mean that military and patrol violence ceased. The difference between

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76 Schirmer, *Guatemalan Military Project*, 94.
77 Some of the largest organizations include CUC, the Group of Mutual Support (GAM), the National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) and CERJ, see Betsy Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls*, 167.
1982-1985 and 1985-1996, was that during the latter period a protest against militarization no longer warranted a massacre in response from the military. The military felt secure that patrollers and communities which had adopted nationalistic and anti-communist ideologies would work in concert with military bases and local outposts to continue limiting and intimidating organizing. That is precisely what happened, organizing and resistance increased, but patrollers and death squads continued intimidation and repression against said organizing. One of their most potent tools of repression was the subversive/non-subversive dichotomy the military pushed during the counterinsurgency. Many patrols became the agents pushing that dichotomy on their communities in the face of dissent and organizing.

The stark rhetorical dichotomy between patroller and guerrilla, or subversive and patriot, was adopted by many patrollers, and especially patrol leaders, to carry out the mission of aligning their communities along military lines. In this way the military gave its local garrisons and patrols the tools to repress any actual, potential or perceived dissent against counterinsurgency. As Americas Watch reported, “Anti-communism and service to the fatherland form the theme of constant meetings of civil patrollers organized and run by the army.”78 The military pressured patrols to adopt a vicious stance against any opposition by defining any opposition as subversive.

More generally, a discursive relationship was established by the military between the URNG (the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca - the united guerrilla army) and human rights groups to encourage the patrols to attack and intimidate human rights organizing as

78 Americas Watch, CERJ, 9.
it became more common in the late 1980s. This hostility against human rights groups was manipulated by civilian and military leaders as well as patrollers and Maya campesinos. For instance, “the aggression of the PACs against the Ombudsman for Human Rights in Parraxut [in March 1990].” showcases the phenomenon of patrols even opposing elements of the Guatemalan state associated with human rights. Patrollers even voiced opposition to the government of de León Carpio that took power in 1993 because he had previously been the Ombudsman of Human Rights: “In Sololá, El Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Alta Verapaz [it has been] reported that... patrollers affirm that ‘the government of de Ramiro (De León Carpio) is going to fall soon, because it is a government of the guerrilla.’” The general opposition of PACs to the constitutional mechanisms for protecting human rights are well documented. For those in a position of authority this subversion discourse was a method of intimidating and limiting activists and civil society groups in the highlands. As the Commission of Human Rights of Guatemala (CDHG) concluded in 1993

the patrols, acting with the total support of the Army of Guatemala, continue assaulting the inhabitants [of Guatemalan localities]...in an outdated anti-communist discourse, [they] assume that those that are against the patrols are necessarily involved in the ranks of the URNG.

Making their own counterinsurgent thought - in which the concept of “enemy” is extended in unlimited form - among the number one current enemies of the patrollers [are] the members of groups defending human rights, [who have] become the main target of their actions.

80 No author, “Cese de las PAC convocación a una asamblea nacional constituyente, Ante la opinión Nacional e Internacional Ante la Futura Administración Gubernamental,” December 13, 1990, CIRMA Historical Archive.
81 CDHG, “Informe de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala a la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Naciones Unidas,” Boletín Internacional, August (1993: 3-4), CIRMA Historical Archive.
The guerrilla-state dichotomy was forced onto the entire population so that no group could function outside of it, helping to explain the constant accusations against human rights groups. For the relatively powerless, Mayas in localities under control of a repressive patrol, this discourse was often deadly. In other ways it justified any and all violence, not just patrol violence against Maya, as anyone killed could be identified post facto as a guerrilla.

This dichotomy played on the reality that from the very outset of patrol formation, patrollers and their communities were not free to negotiate the bounds of the obligation. According to the Committee for Peace and Justice of Guatemala, “the intimidation that is contained intrinsically within the system of patrols, makes it impossible that campesinos can make any denunciation and the controls to which they are subjected do not permit them to oppose [the patrols].” A function of the patrol structure was not only to prevent internal community organization against the military, but also to intimidate those within the patrol. In part, this stemmed from a racial fear of patrollers that stemmed from most of them being Mayas. Gramajo openly stated that prior to 1982, “With the strategy of the EGP being played out as whites fighting Indians, we [in the army] saw in every Indian an enemy...but we did not have the chance to deal with this ethnic conflict until the 1982 coup [with model villages and civil patrols].” Another factor was the paranoia spread within communities and patrols. The military monetarily incentivized being an oreja or spy for the military who reported on dissent within

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83 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 84.
patrols. Leaving a patrol or disbanding one required solidarity within the entire patrol, because a pro-military minority could gain from reporting dissent to the local army base. Patrols not only controlled communities and Mayas as peoples, but their internal dynamics typically acted to restrain the maneuvering capabilities of patrollers from within, further incentivizing pro-military stances.\textsuperscript{84}

Some of the only groups in the countryside that effectively resisted the imposition of military authority over their social life were the Communities of Populations in Resistance or CPRs, survivors of massacres or other forms of army violence who fled into mountainous areas where they could live free- albeit under duress- from military hierarchies. The military campaigns against the CPRs were brutal and continued well into the 1990s precisely because CPRs represented an affront to the ideological and physical projects of militarization that the military was constructing in the countryside. Because CPRs were some of the only communities that avoided militarization, continuing repression against CPRs demonstrates the continuing emphasis on militarization as population control that lasted until the end of the war. The Communities of Populations in Resistance of the Sierra and the Ixcan describes military actions in 1994 in the Ixil as such:

The army of Guatemala has carried out a campaign of pressure, threats and intimidation in the villages and communities in order to obligate them to integrate themselves into the civil patrols.

The official from the army headquarters of Chajul met with the leaders of the PACs. He said to them that the CPRs are communists of the URNG and that … their movement must be impeded and they cannot be received in the communities. They also ordered the PACs to be armed with Galil rifles, because the war is going to become more intense… At this meeting it was ordered to hand over a list of

\textsuperscript{84} America Watch, \textit{Civil Patrols}, 48.
patrollers that no longer want to patrol, so that the army could go and sort it out with them.\footnote{Comunidades de Población en Resistencia de la Sierra, “Ejército también está preparando acciones militares contra las CPR de la Sierra a través de las patrullas civiles: Topic 116,” 16th March, 1994, Princeton Collection, http://pudl.princeton.edu/sheetreader.php?obj=ev43nx78q.}

In general, communities effectively had no choice as to whether or not to form patrols under military supervision. When patrollers as late as 1994 in the Ixil wanted to cease the obligation, the military used the threat or practice of violence to keep them from doing so. Furthermore, the pattern of military-patrol communication and the transfer of ideology is illustrated when the military assembled the patrol only two years before the end of the war, and reminded the patrollers that the CPRs were communists precisely because they would not submit to militarization. Thus military ideology dictated that CPRs could not be allowed to move freely. Free movement was to be reserved for communities with, or which had had, patrols. Even though the violence of war was at a relatively low point in 1994, the threat that the military was re-arming the patrol in order to augment the war itself was a clear signal that the CPRs were not safe. Ultimately, allegations of subversion remained potent and serious until at least after the war’s end.

Since most patrollers did not enjoy or desire the continuation of the obligation to serve, the military had to structure the patrols in such a way that the leader or jefe benefitted considerably from being pro-military. This led to the widespread phenomenon of dictatorial, abusive and violent patrol jefes all across Guatemala.\footnote{America Watch, Civil Patrols, 34.} It is useful to recall that these jefes were considered by Gramajo the “first-class leaders” in the countryside. It was very common for
complaints in human rights reports of patrol repression to be targeted at jefes rather than rank-and-file patrollers. Furthermore, jefes used coercive mechanisms internal to patrols to promote more violent patrols. The phenomenon of targeting anyone who sought to escape military power as subversive was carried out, among patrollers, most fiercely by jefes acting as mediums for military commissioners and bases. The case of Ruben Cruz in Chel targeting CPRs and other dissidents illustrates this well:

Ruben Cruz, who had once lived in the CPRs and whose wife had been raped by soldiers, is the current head of the civil patrol and maintains dictatorial control over the community [of Chel, El Quiché]... The civil patrol remains a particularly strong force in Chel and regularly harasses and persecutes those who oppose the policy of the army towards the CPRs. The army has communicated its policy to the civil patrollers and has verbally ordered them to carry out acts of hostility and aggression against CPR residents who attempt to buy or sell products in Chel...Ruben Cruz has murdered several residents of Chel...Ruben Cruz has gone into hiding to avoid prosecution, and residents of Chel have accused the military base in Santa Cruz del Quiché of harboring him.

Cruz achieved privilege and forgiveness for having been in a CPR, in return for the violence he carried out as a patrol jefe. As a patrol jefe, he then benefitted from impunity. This pattern would be repeated throughout the war and even following its conclusion. Jefes held up demobilizations and prevented civilians from taking back municipal and local control from militarized sources of authority. Jefes directly led and pushed attacks and threats against civil society and human rights monitors in return for their positions and because they had already committed and led violence in the name of military authority. In the face of a system that localized army discourses through violence and the destruction of non-army social structures, those who successfully protested to

\[87\] Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 93-94.

have patrollers, usually *jefes*, taken to court and imprisoned for crimes, were stymied by the usual failure of courts to imprison those responsible.  

**Santiago Atitlán and the End of a Patrol**

On the night of December 2, 1990 in the almost entirely Tz’utujil Maya community of Santiago Atitlán, the military fired into a crowd of between 2,000 and 4,000 people, killing 14 and wounding 21. Massive popular and public pressure followed the massacre. Remarkably, the military pulled out its base from Santiago Atitlán roughly three weeks later on December 20, seemingly as a result. This made it one of the few largely Maya and rural communities to achieve this feat. As was aptly understood at the time by various organizations, the civil-military relationship in Santiago Atitlán, before, during, and after the events of December 1990, “[provided] hints regarding the possibility that meaningful social changes can be effected in a country whose military has penetrated virtually all aspects of the society.” The events in Santiago Atitlán from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s demonstrate the pressures for militarization and patrol formation on a relatively large Maya community, and how even in the face of the “success” of December 1990, the community continued to suffer harassment for their newfound autonomy. The case of Santiago Atitlán shows how despite pressures to maintain militarization, one community was able to escape its patrol obligation under unique but revealing circumstances.

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89Courts regularly failed to convict those deemed responsible for violence from early on in the counterinsurgency. For instance, in 1985 a court of appeals overturned the sentencing of thirty years in prison for 17 patrols members from Fray Bartolome de las Casas, Alta Verapaz, who had killed four people; *Inforpress Centroamerica*, “Resurgen delitos de las PAC,” (March 3, 1988: 10).


Santiago Atitlán had been suffering threats and acts of state violence, as well as violence from guerrillas, since the early 1980s. In 1985, for example, following a “marked increase in guerrilla activity … and arbitrary violence and death threats by the military, there [were] alarming reports of the government’s intention to ‘clean out’ the town.”\textsuperscript{92} Apparently the military intended around this time to use violence to “Kill what they had to and divide up the people.”\textsuperscript{93} These plans for a model village never came to pass. However, in 1986 to 1987 the military made major incursions into Santiago Atitlán to set up a base and send out a list of 188 names of those ordered to form new civil patrols. The previous patrol had been dissolved in 1986. Between January and March, 1988, 24 residents were disappeared.\textsuperscript{94} Only with the outcry against the massacre of December 2, 1990, was the community able to gain the upper hand against militarization. In the wake of that event, the pent-up pain of years of state violence were laid bare; when the Human Rights Ombudsman (at that time future president Ramiro de León Carpio) arrived in Santiago Atitlán,

he was met by an outpouring of denunciations, as if a floodgate of emotions had been opened following a decade of deathly silence. Less than 24 hours after the killings, 15,000 thumbprints had been collected on a petition demanding that those responsible be investigated, tried, and punished, and that the army base be removed immediately.\textsuperscript{95}

As opposed to other communities such as those of Aguacatán, militarization and patrolling were clearly unpopular, perhaps more apparent here because the inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán were finally afforded a window to voice their grievances. With the massacre of December 2, the

\textsuperscript{92} Indigenous Peoples’ Network, “Guatemala: Preparation for a Massacre?”
\textsuperscript{93} Indigenous Peoples’ Network, “Guatemala: Preparation for a Massacre?”
\textsuperscript{95} Loucky and Carlsen, “Massacre in Santiago Atitlán,” 67.
community was able to disband patrols once again. Santiago Atitlán and the surrounding communities of Lake Atitlán are popular tourist destinations and relatively well-connected to travel and communicative infrastructure. The mass funeral of victims was attended by at least 50 reporters, and the Ombudsman quickly issued a report. Guatemala was also in the final days of a presidential electoral campaign, and the massacre quickly became an electoral issue that forced the Guatemalan Congress to act and unanimously call for the military to leave the community. Santiago Atitlán’s history of resistance since 1982 combusted in a moment of high publicity. These factors both contributed to and were buoyed by huge international pressure, leading the military to concede to the protests and withdraw their base.

Gramajo, in an interview with Jennifer Schirmer, cited the December 2 massacre in Santiago Atitlán as an example of the consequences of a community not accepting a strong patrol. According to him, had patrols been accepted fully from 1982 onwards, “first-class leaders” in the form of patrol jefes could have foreseen the discord of Santiago Atitlán and prevented it. Because Santiago Atitlán had not organized with the army, it was still stuck where most of the countryside had been in 1982; as Gramajo states, “[in Santiago Atitlán] the people were defending themselves against both the army and subversion…[because of this] the people suffer.” Santiago Atitlán represented a deviation from the civil-military project, which would result in continuing repression.

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97 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 95.
98 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 95.
The community quickly constructed new forms of civil organization, but the military did not leave the community alone. Army units came into the town several times in 1991 pursuing “aggressive elements,” only to be met by protestors. Well-armed troops increased their activity in neighboring communities, distributing leaflets saying “the people trust the army.”\(^9\) In nearby communities in the same department soldiers and patrollers continued to carry out violence against communities, with members of those communities denouncing such abuses. Ultimately, Santiago Atitlán provided a hopeful view of what might come from attempts at demilitarization, with the Guatemalan Commission of Human Rights, the CDHG concluding that:

> The fight against the reinstallation of the military base and the reorganization of the civil patrols in Santiago Atitlán constitute an important part of the popular struggle for demilitarization of the country and the strengthening of civil society, for so many years crushed under the heel of the military.\(^{10}\)

The CDHG’s analysis was accurate. Even in moments of apparent success at demilitarizing their communities, the military continued to use violence, albeit more selectively, to indicate that Santiago Atitlán's deviation from the civil-military strategy had limits. Like in the case of CPRs, pressure to respect and maintain military power continued until the end of the war. This occurred despite the decrease nationwide in the presence of guerrillas. If anything the case of Santiago Atitlán shows the tenacity with which the military attempted to maintain its power in the countryside, regardless of the original justifications for militarization. That Santiago Atitlán had managed to demilitarize in the first place carried incredible significance.

**Clandestine Cemeteries and the Civil Patrols**


\(^{10}\) CDHG, “Santiago Atitlán,” 8.
The departure of the military and the dismantling of the military base near Santiago Atitlán led to a new discovery: a clandestine cemetery found where the military base had been located. This discovery shows the inseparable link between the material remnants of violence and the power of militarization to condition the memories of said violence. To many communities, excavating these cemeteries was crucial as a means to reclaim civil autonomy.

As state violence declined in the late 1980s, communities working with human rights and civil society organizations began carrying out excavations of clandestine cemeteries. Most of those cemeteries had been created in the 1982-1983 period of counterinsurgency. The excavation of the cemeteries carried immense psychological, political, cultural and symbolic significance as a method of honoring the dead, of reclaiming memory from violent and coercive forces and of accounting for the disappeared. Because patrols were the instantiation of on-the-ground local military power, they were the primary mechanism by which the military intimidated and punished those carrying out these excavations. The repression and intimidation of cemetery excavations demonstrate a function of patrols as controlling the memories of violence and strengthening impunity by making it more difficult to account for the dead, and to account for who did the killing.

The military and patrols routinely threatened cemetery excavations. Many patrollers had taken part in massacres that produced the remains in clandestine cemeteries, usually under direct military commands. Clandestine cemetery excavations had the capacity to reveal events of the past, and thus challenge the narrative the military had spread in rural communities through

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patrols, model villages, and Poles of Development. In other words, the evidence from those excavations could be used to weaken the military’s grip on a community, and indict patrollers for the crimes that caused those deaths. The military promulgated a logic that conveniently blamed guerrillas and those carrying out excavations for the deaths. Gramajo articulated this logic by saying that

"The dead were all buried by subversives and that’s why clandestine cemeteries exist. It is very odd that there are people who know exactly where these graves are located. They know where they are buried and now they are trying to make it look as if they were victims of the PACs."

The nature of the patrolling obligation relied on patrols being seen as agents that fought and prevented subversion, not forces guilty of crimes. If clandestine cemeteries were excavated and those responsible were identified, it would be disastrous to the arguments that the guerrillas were responsible for the violence. The research of the CEH made this abundantly clear. Most importantly, the communities themselves would be armed with this information, possibly dealing a fatal blow to the ideology the military had used patrols and militarization to spread.

One organization, the Group of Mutual Support (GAM), was founded by family members of disappeared individuals in order to challenge the state over the fates of the disappeared. In practice, GAM became one of the major groups supporting clandestine excavations. Cemeteries proved to be crucial points of contention for disproving or upholding military narratives about the conduct of the counterinsurgency. As demonstrated in one newspaper, for instance,

GAM, [has] dedicated itself to the work of finding evidence that can reveal the horrible cases of extrajudicial killings that occurred especially in the 1980s….the families of those disappeared are still asking “where are they? Do we have to find them between the living and the dead?” Because there was a serious lack of proof,

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102 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 98.
GAM decided to dig up the past, and up to today has denounced over 150 clandestine cemeteries located principally in El Quiché, Chimaltenango, Mazatenango, Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, Cobán, Rabinal, and the Southern Coast.  

Bodies in clandestine cemeteries had to remain buried for years after their deaths because patrols and the military made the consequences of excavating them clear. But GAM worked in concert with anthropologists, human rights monitors and others committed to opening political space for protest and resistance against militarization by making clear the scale of carnage that had occurred. This work strengthened the position of those working for human rights, giving them evidence to support their claims against militarization. These campaigns were strengthened by cooperation with international and national media:

Today with the light of the national and international press, finally they are able to reveal the tracks of the past, the clandestine cemeteries reveal an enormous violation of the right of life, and of course they teach us that these violent deaths, still, remain unpunished.

The response of the military and patrollers to the excavations indicated that they perceived the campaigns as dangerous to the militarization-counterinsurgency project. Their response also demonstrates the continuing effectiveness of subversion discourse, and how the military expanded the targets of that discourse to anyone who worked with victims of state violence. The response of Yon Rivera, the head of the Department of Information and Circulation of the Army, provides such an example:

Frigate Captain Julio Alberto Yon Rivera … said that “the subject of the clandestine cemeteries has been the object of manipulation, as immediately the [army] is blamed as responsible for the violence.”

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104 David Flores Castillo, “150 cementerios clandestinos revelan las huellas del pasado,” 2.
What no one says is that those cemeteries are the product of a period of violence produced as a part of armed aggression against the Guatemalan state...so... those responsible for this are that group of people that for 31 years have sought to put down Guatemala by way of arms.105

In this way the military tried discursively to mark the campaign to excavate clandestine cemeteries as outside the limits of acceptable national discussion on the violence of the 1980s. Supposedly, those cemeteries were formed because the military was defending the Guatemalan state, and as such any attempt to use them to criticize the military aided the URNG and subversive forces. The military, through patrols and commissioners, disseminated this line of thought, which came to include criticisms of anthropologists and certain press outlets as sources and promulgators of the subversion which the military, using patrols, had sought to control and defeat. As one journal put it,

[Captain] Julio Yon questioned the declarations of anthropologist Clyde Snow, and assured that all [Snow] wants is international publicity to ensure his future. Furthermore, [Yon declared] “We deny the participation of the Army of Guatemala in relation to clandestine cemeteries...Who really are the skeletons found in clandestine cemeteries of El Quiché?”106

According to Julio Yon, the clandestine cemeteries were not only a kind of organic consequence of the fight against guerrillas. The Army did not even have a role in their creation. Anyone who tried to blame the military for what was found in excavations was doing so for selfish reasons at best. If clandestine cemeteries were not the creation of the military, it left open the issue of who had created them. As will be seen, in practice if anyone was charged with those killings it usually was local agents of the military, such as patrollers, patrol jefés, and military commissioners.

105 David Flores Castillo, “150 cementerios clandestinos revelan las huellas del pasado,” 3.  
106 David Flores Castillo, “150 cementerios clandestinos revelan las huellas del pasado,” 3.
The case of the killings of Rio Negro, Alta Verapaz demonstrate the politics and discourses used by the military and excavators and forensic anthropologists in the fight over impunity and responsibility. In the early 1980s, the government killed as many as 5,000 people in the areas around Rio Negro, in response to their refusal to relocate for the construction of a dam. What this case shows is that militarization and patrol formation were intrinsically linked with massacre and clandestine cemetery creation. According to one reporter,

In February 1981, the guerrilla burned the market of Xococ, a village located five kilometers from Rio Negro whose population collaborated with the Army. One of the first contingents of civil population, that later would be formalized as the PACs was trained there….the day after the burning of the market, the military commissioners called on all men to present themselves in Xococ.\(^{107}\)

The massacre of Rio Negro was notably large and infamous. It was not mere coincidence that patrol formation was linked directly with massacre. The military targeted the effort to excavate the Rio Negro massacres as opportunistic and disingenuous given the distance of the excavators from the actual events and the ongoing peace negotiations, as one reporter described:

In the middle of a political war facing the international community, the exhumation of Rio Negro puts the squeeze on the Armed Forces. ... again the tense issue of the PACs and the Truth Commission [has arisen], which the Peace Plan of the Government has left out…[the Army] only questions why the denunciations have arisen precisely in the days before the third Assembly of Human Rights. What a coincidence that they are just now bringing these cases to light, indicates the military spokesman Alvaro Rivas, leaving his suspicion that the denunciations of clandestine cemeteries are a strategy used by the guerrilla in order to discredit the government.\(^{108}\)


\(^{108}\) María Olga Paiz, “Cuando los muertos hablan,” 2.
The military and government negotiators purposefully refused to consider the issue of a Truth Commission and patrol demobilization in the 1992-3 round of negotiations, saying that patrols would end with the end of the war only, and that a Truth Commission was an unnecessary “Commission of the Past.” Military logic dictated that the human rights groups and parts of the press were purposefully attempting to aid the guerrillas in the continuing war and negotiations, suggesting that if they genuinely cared about the disappearances, they would have brought the issue up earlier. The purpose of such statements and logics was to give agents of militarization such as patrols and commissioners discursive tools to fight efforts to promote human rights and demilitarization in the countryside.

One reporter described how the military base had been able to convene the men of two communities to instruct them directly in how anyone carrying out exhumations was a guerrillero:

Saturday July 23 [1994], the inhabitants of Pacux and Xococ were convened in a meeting in front of the military base, where an official that identified as the second [in] command of military zone 2 … [told] those convened that they should not help with the exhumations… [he] indicated that the denunciations presented by those affected signalled, according to the military, that those who promoted the exhumation are guerrilleros, and the press that publishes this information is also linked to the guerrillas.110

The fact that the commander was simply capable of calling all the men so easily and delivering this speech to them indicates the power of militarized local networks. Even though these men

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were no longer in patrols, their interactions and responses to organizing were still being monitored by local forces of militarization. The anthropologist Victoria Sanford, through participating in an excavation in Rabinal, Alta Verapaz in 1994, provided a more intimate account:

“The order [to assemble] was received in the morning. By noon, there were several thousand men waiting in the sun at the base. At two in the afternoon, the subcommander greeted the crowd and began a lecture. He told the peasants not to pursue the exhumations. 'The anthropologists, internationals and journalists are all guerrilla,' he explained. 'You know what happens when you help the guerrilla. Collaborating with the guerrilla will bring back the violence of 1982,' he warned. 'Now I am going to give you an order,' he said, 'Leave the dead in peace.'”

These two excerpts powerfully illustrate the control that military installations could send through localities, regardless of the presence of patrols. Sanford detailed how excavations were often accompanied by local enthusiasm. The military constantly revived the specter of linking the communities with the guerrillas, extending that equation to excavation. Anyone digging up the past could only be a guerrillero. To excavate was to disrespect the dead by bringing back the conditions that caused their deaths, the nebulous violence of 1982 caused by the mere presence of guerrillas. Only two years before the end of the war, the military official at the base maintained a powerful hold over local populations, regardless of patroller or non-patroller status. The spectre of “the violence of 1982” was a fear seared into the hearts of many Maya in the highlands, regardless of who was actually responsible for that violence, and as such taking the position to support an excavation was a huge effort and sacrifice on the part of an ordinary

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111 Sanford, Buried Secrets, 44.
112 Sanford, Buried Secrets, 41.
community member. It was an act of resistance in the face of a complex and menacing array of coercive mechanisms created and employed by the military.

The processes of clandestine cemetery excavation, human rights work and patrol protest and were intimately linked, with each phenomenon becoming more widespread following the democratic opening of 1985. As articulated by the CDHG, “The discovery of clandestine cemeteries...has helped to determine that civil patrollers were those responsible for innumerable forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.”

As demonstrated above by the threat of the subcommander from Rabinal that the violence of 1982 might return if locals allowed in human rights workers, the army and by extension the state incentivized locals to keep human rights workers out. It was argued by agents of the military that by refusing to seek out the sites of burial and to talk to human rights workers would prevent the creation of new massacres and cemeteries. The army was actively trying to keep Mayas and victims from discussing or sharing their memories, and from providing material evidence of previous repression and massacre. In Chontala, Chichicastenango, only after “various attempts to proceed with the exhumation with the open opposition of the PAC [there],” was a team able to carry out an excavation of over a hundred bodies. Victims and family members of victims often knew where clandestine cemeteries were and had for years prior for a point where they felt safe enough to explore that physical terrain.

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113 CDHG, “Informe de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala a la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Naciones Unidas,” Boletín Internacional, August 1993, CIRMA Historical Archive, 12.
115 Sanford, Buried Secrets, 17.
military and state to label all dissidents guerrillas, and to maintain active civil patrols in localities it had previously destroyed. The power of violence to shape discourses and local histories of the war and la violencia is demonstrated keenly by the tense situation that existed in each community regarding exhumations. As with other countries where the state or state agents disappeared individuals, the inability to definitively and openly discuss the fate of a friend or family member had and has immense psychological repercussions. In the cases of rural Guatemalans, who often knew what had happened but could not recognize it openly, it was immensely painful.

A central aspect of the creation of the civil patrol system was the widespread climate of impunity that flourished in Guatemala. Patrols were shielded by a corrupt judicial and security apparatus that systematically failed to prosecute crimes committed by patrollers, with MINUGUA citing control of rural communities by patrols as a major factor in the rise of impunity. Impunity correlated with the strength of the civil patrol system, so much so that Margaret Popkin referred to Huehuetenango, with its notably powerful patrols, as a “national park for impunity.” The amnesty issued by Ríos Montt served as a lure to bring the vulnerable into the repressive system established in the 1982-1983 period. In March 1988, Inforpress Centroamericana reported on the discovery of twenty-three bodies in a clandestine cemetery in Chichicastenango, while patrollers were threatening the exhumation. The bodies were identified as those of ex-guerrillas who had taken advantage of the amnesty, and were swiftly told to “join the PACs,” according to El Gráfico. Two ex-commanders were accused of orchestrating the

116 Margaret Popkin, The Civil Patrols and their Legacy, 21.
killings, and despite having been ex-patrol commanders by 1988, they were assumed still to be behind the threats against the excavation:  

According to declarations of an ex-patroller, one night his commanders “announced that there was a black list indicating certain people of the canton to be killed.” This [individual] also informed [us] that all the members of the population knew “who were the dead, where they were buried and who were those that incited the massacre.” However, no one dared denounce it to the authorities because almost all of the inhabitants were threatened by the patrol jefes.  

Thus described above, importantly by an ex-patroller, is the network of local repression that allowed for the suppression of practices that would have honored the memory of the dead. The refusal to recognize the massacres affirmed the social changes wrought by violence. This repression was imbedded in a system of patrol jefe authority backed up by army authority. Everyone in Chiche knew where the site of burial was, but as affirmed by work done by Victoria Sanford, they could not go there, as patrol jefes knew that the unearthing of those bodies was questioning the army narrative on why the massacres happened. According to the logic of the state and army, guerrillas should never be honored with funeral rituals, and the only people buried there were guerrillas. 

Thus, the struggle over cemetery excavation illustrates nearly every social dynamic of militarization. Employing discourses of subversion and guerrillaphobia, patrols reified military power and narratives by intimidating those carrying out cemetery excavations. This was not only an affront to sensibilities of the families and friends of victim, but to Maya burial practices. Patrons were an instrument for allowing the military to control the memory of violence. This is

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120 Sanford, Buried Secrets, 17.
part of why human rights and civil society organizations protesting patrols and militarization often emphasized the importance of Maya rights as distinct peoples. Counterinsurgency often affronted Maya cultures, prompting a need to protest for that culture to be respected.

Chapter 3: CERJ, Civil Patrols and Organizing for Maya Rights

The maintenance of civil patrols was the result of many factors that interacted on local, departmental, national and international levels. On one hand, this thesis has analyzed how military planners, patrollers, and community members perceived the patrol system and its social and political consequences. This chapter instead explores the perspective of a civil society group and human rights monitor: The Council of Ethnic Communities “Runujel Junam” (K’iche’ for “Everyone is Equal”), or CERJ. CERJ’s protests and goals reveal how one major activist group in the highlands understood counterinsurgency and conceived of reversing it. CERJ worked on the ground and in communities with patrols to show how patrols continued to attack and intimidate organizing well after the peak of counterinsurgency violence. Furthermore, CERJ directly addressed the consequences of patrol activity and militarization, aiming to protect rural Guatemalans and Mayas from the effects of militarization.

In practice, CERJ was the most focused anti-civil patrol organization. CERJ experienced directly how patrols contributed to impunity, militarization, ethnocide (the deliberate and systematic destruction of the culture of an ethnic group) and the maintenance of racial inequality. Its actions show what activists believed had to be done to end the civil patrols and the repressive phenomena implemented with and by patrols. Their documents reveal a consistent blueprint and vision for how to construct democracy and rule of law, and create equality in rural communities.
most affected by state violence. CERJ consistently highlighted and rejected the racism of counterinsurgency. Because racism was a design feature of counterinsurgency CERJ connected its activism against patrols with the promotion of human and Maya-ethnic rights, believing they were all aspects of the same struggle. By connecting that campaign to other campaigns for human rights education, legal advising, the promotion of Maya rights and culture, and community resettlement, CERJ devised that a widespread knowledge of human rights and the constitution was essential to ending military power, patrols, and impunity.

CERJ was a human rights organization that emerged in July 1988 in Santa Cruz del Quiché, whose leaders stated that “[since 1988], our first task is and has been to work towards the dissolution of the PACs.” Before CERJ had formally coalesced as an organization, its immediate activist predecessors were organizing against acts and structures of patrols. Even though CERJ does not initially define itself as an anti-patrol organization, in practice it sought to bring attention to and combat patrol abuses since its beginning. In May 1988, a public complaint was issued by “the indigenous communities of the department of El Quiché,” with CERJ’s stamp present at the bottom of the document. It details how the army had violated the constitution by forcing them to serve in civil patrols. Those responsible include “patrol commanders, military commissioners and Ladinos serving the army.” Even though Mayas make up some of the first two groups, the signers consciously cited racial inequality as a motivating factor for the structure of the repression. In an attempt to cite the need for national civilian power to intervene against

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local military power, the letter appeals to the president, the national assembly, and civil authorities to “implement the observance of Article 34.” This document from May 1988 called for an intervention in the name of the constitution against militarization. It is doubtful, given the intense repression of organizations connecting communities throughout the highlands, that even a representative sample might have organized to issue such a complaint. Still, the document definitely states that as “The indigenous communities of El Quiché, we reject service in the civil patrols of self-defense. We want the army to leave our communities…. Viva the working class of the countryside and city!” As in this document, CERJ claimed throughout its organizing to represent indigenous communities generally, despite the fact that many of these communities contained Ladinos, many Ladinos were forced to serve in patrols, and many communities felt patrols had some beneficial functions.

The document from May 1988 set out the reforms CERJ believed were necessary to end militarization and its legacies. Protection of Maya rights had to be strengthened, the rule of law and constitutional protections had to be enforced in the countryside, and patrols had to be made voluntary or abolished. Human rights education and documenting abuses were the mechanisms to promote these positions in rural communities, which is why patrols routinely stood in the way of those goals.

123 Article 34 established a right of association that technically made forced patrol service unconstitutional.
With its formal creation in July 1988, CERJ, headed by Coordinator General Amilcar Méndez, a Ladino, laid out its immediate goals without mentioning the civil patrols:

[CERJ has been founded] With the goal that a fundamental acceptance of the ethnicities of the country, their culture and their identity be observed, [a goal] which requires specific political programs and solutions.

[CERJ’s] immediate objectives are:

1. To disseminate knowledge of human rights, the laws and institutions created in this country so that their full observance, respect and defense can come about.

2. To recognize the actions that the Guatemalan state expands upon in terms of human rights.

3. To reflect on the importance of human rights for all Guatemalans, especially for the indigenous ethnicities [who are] autochthonous and legitimate representatives of the Guatemalan nationality.

4. The council emerges as a response to the organizational needs and the advances of the struggles of the Maya people that fight for democracy, social justice and the dignity of the ethnicities; as such [it emerges] to fight against all manner of ethnic and cultural oppression and discrimination.\(^{124}\)

In this opening declaration, CERJ outlines the core of its beliefs on its role, relation to the people of the communities it works in, and goals. The declaration merges the goals of human rights education, the promotion of civil power and society, of constitutional rule and Maya rights as

humans, peoples and Guatemalans. In a country where Mayas to the present day have been
treated as second-class citizens (when they have been treated as citizens at all), CERJ saw a path
through the relatively progressive 1985 constitution and the human rights discourses gaining
popularity in the 1970s and 1980s to extend to Mayas the rights of urban middle-class Ladinos.

In practice, in the late 1980s the biggest obstacle to human rights education and constitutional
rule was the civil patrol system. CERJ was already citing the civil patrols as a major instrument
of repression, but chose not to mention them by name in this declarative document.126

CERJ’s claim to explicitly represent Mayas in its efforts to target the patrol system
points to certain aspects of the maintenance of the patrol system. As discussed earlier, the system
was designed racistly towards Mayas and maintained on the back of racial inequality in the
countryside between Ladinos and Mayas. For instance, to Gramajo the patrols were an tool for
“forging the indian.”127 CERJ asserted here that in fact such discourses were wrong-headed and
offensive, and that Mayas could and were speaking up for themselves, through CERJ. Those
affiliated Maya were indicating that if the national government was going to aid the Maya
people, militarization via the civil patrol system was not an acceptable method. CERJ argued

125 Americas Watch, CERJ, 17.
127 Schirmer, Guatemalan Military Project, 114.
that, instead, the constitutional guarantees that accompany citizenship were necessary to allow Mayas to live as an equal part of the Guatemalan nation.

CERJ also organized to place a Maya presence and Maya voices in the direct view of the national government and urban Ladinos, as CUC had done beginning in the late 1970s. 128 In an article in the *Central American Reporter* from November 1988, John Lindsay-Poland reported on CERJ’s march in Guatemala City on August 17, 1988, in which

CERJ marched through Guatemala City demanding respect for their rights under the constitution. The march was an impressive sight. Two hundred marchers, mostly indigenous women and many barefoot, walked in total silence to the National Congress building where they demanded “to be treated like human beings and not as folkloric objects....We only want those who want to continue patrolling to patrol, but not to threaten others,” said one of the CERJ directorate in halting Spanish…. “the people go on feeling afraid. We are in a harder slavery.”129

CERJ took their demands directly to the capital and to the national congress to bypass the local military powers that had been established by the counterinsurgency. In that march, in which were apparent the stereotypical symbols of Maya identity such as bare feet and use of Spanish as a second language, the marchers welded together demands for the end to the abuses of the patrol system and the treatment of Mayas. CERJ conspicuously had not demanded the abolition of the

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patrols system. The quotation from the member of the directorate encapsulated the multi-faceted thrust of CERJ’s activism: taming or ending the civil patrols must simultaneously involve the empowerment of Mayas by the state.

CERJ’s rhetoric focusing on discrimination against Mayas, and its call of “Viva the working class” indicated the influence of older activism from the over a decade earlier. It is likely that those who were taking part in the indigenous meetings that precluded CERJ and those who began the organization had prior relationships with CUC members and other organizations that had been working to stress the importance of Maya and class-based struggles since the mid-1970s. CUC’s earlier rhetoric offers a prelude to that of CERJ in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1980, CUC gathered at the Iximche ruins to protest the firebombing of the Spanish Embassy by the Guatemalan government which had killed many of their members and supporters (including Rigoberta Menchú’s father, Vicente Menchú). The speaker’s declaration resembles CERJ’s rhetoric:

We must strengthen the unity and solidarity between Indians and Ladinos. . . . For a society based upon equality and respect; that our Indian people, as such, be able to develop their culture, broken by the criminal invaders; for a just economy in which no one exploits others; that land be communal as our ancestors had it; for a people without discrimination, that all repression, torture, kidnapping, murder and massacres cease; that forced recruitment by the army cease; that we all have the same right to work, that we will not continue being utilized as objects of tourism; for the just distribution and utilization of riches as in times during which the ancestors flourished.  

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131 Greg Grandin, “To End with All These Evils,” 20.
Here CUC cites similar forms of discrimination against Mayas later cited by CERJ in their march of Guatemala City in August 1988. CERJ believed that Maya culture needed to be free from violence and from repression in the form of civil patrols, a structure imposed by a Ladino state and Ladino-led military. Furthermore, the call to end the folkloric use of Maya cultures and people for tourism purposes was a common theme of CERJ documents. CUC was founded in Santa Cruz del Quiché, the same town as CERJ. CUC re-emerged as a functioning organization in Guatemala in 1987, only a year before CERJ was inaugurated. They worked together. While CUC was more focused on the class struggle faced by Mayas and Ladino peasants, CERJ constantly stressed the connection between the repression of Mayas and the repression of the civil patrol system. This did not stop CERJ from discussing or working for the rights of Ladinos. An account of CERJ’s organizational resources recorded their employment of “two sociologists, an indigenous person and a Ladino, who are fluent in the Guatemalan ethnic question.” But, while CERJ was eager to work for the benefit of Ladino peasants facing the patrol system or other forms of repression, an indigenous, autochthonous, or Maya struggle was their focus. The origin of these activists’ focus on discrimination against Mayas goes back more than a decade. This emphasis on various Maya identities in organizing that opposed repression radiated throughout the late 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s, so that by the time CERJ arose, their multi-ethnic organization elevated an ethnic struggle for Maya rights as central to their goals of economic reform, human rights and patrol abolition.

CERJ’s commitment to combating ethnocide, genocide, and promoting Maya cultural and ethnic rights through constitutional means led to their recognition by international human rights organizations. For instance, Americas Watch focused a 1989 report on CERJ. The Americas Watch report from 1989 claims that “CERJ takes seriously the notion that constitutional guarantees apply to Indians, even if this notion has gained no acceptance in society at large.”\footnote{Americas Watch, \textit{Persecuting Human Rights Monitors: The CERJ in Guatemala} (New York and D.C.: The Americas Watch Committee, May 1989), 2.} In its outline of its goals, CERJ literally stated in the same sentence their project of “education based in the formation of pro-human rights communal leaders and the defense of the ethnic and cultural values of the Maya people.”\footnote{CERJ, “Breve descripción genérica de los proyectos de trabajo del CERJ.”} For CERJ, one could not come without the other. Even though CERJ declines in this particular document to note the relation of the anti-patrol struggle to a struggle for the rights of Mayas, their efforts at human rights education in rural areas indicate their goal of trying to bring constitutional knowledge to disproportionately Maya communities. Such knowledge would hopefully be followed by increased power for and use of civilian institutions and civil society. CERJ’s mission was to end the civil patrol system by simultaneously constructing a general knowledge of human rights among as much of the Maya population as possible so that they might organize independently or with CERJ against militarization and forced service. By “carrying news of the Constitution to Indian villagers who,
having been told by the army that the constitution is a guerrilla document, do not believe that Article 34 really exists,” CERJ pushed for more space for human rights-based organizing. For this they were targeted viciously.136

Through several explicit publications, CERJ indicates that racial conscious-raising and cross-Maya organizing were instrumental in achieving an end to patrolling and genuine citizenship. In a publication discussing the unity of the Maya peoples, CERJ embraced a rhetoric similar to that of many groups around the quincentennial protests of 1992, in particularly with their open use of the word “Maya.”137 It begins, “The indigenous peoples of Guatemala - Mayas - have sustained a heroic fight of resistance for over 450 years.” The entire document details an envisioned history of resistance, wrongs against Maya peoples, justifications for asserting the importance of a “great common trunk” of Maya culture, and histories of mestizaje/ladinization. At the end of the publication the rhetoric seen in the march in Guatemala City from August 17, 1988, had amplified considerably:

The idea of the indigenous as a being, [who is] backwards, petrified, or the belief in their inevitable disappearance is [the] inept fruit of ignorance and prejudice… [the indigenous] identity persists and is affirmed, and changes with its environment. This is called ethnic-resistance. Resistance of the ethnicities to losing their cultural identity…. Many [indigenous people] that we encounter are not only peasants but workers, businesspeople, professionals, etc. In this process many leave their cultural identity to the side, the large majority proud and secure succeed in maintaining their new job and cultural identity, defending/reclaiming

136 Americas Watch, CERJ, 2.
the vigilance of their language, of their dialect, of their customs and their
traditions and they defend their right to participate in the destiny of this country to
obtain social justice and the recognition of their identity. Only by pushing for “ethnic-resistance” and “ethnic rights” did CERJ and other organizations
feel they could accurately articulate the reality of the human rights situation in the countryside, in
which the counterinsurgency reified unequal ethnic and class relations that had been in place for
over a century. In this case, ethnic-resistance, to CERJ, took the form of the abolition of civil
patrols.

In an undated pamphlet CERJ detailed at length the incredible intricacy of the struggle
for “the revindication of Maya people … laying out indigenous unity in order to defend our
identity and our historic and cultural personality.” Furthermore, CERJ explicitly stated that they
had arisen as an organization to create the conditions for an “agrarian transformation” to benefit
the Maya people. The pamphlet placed in bold that one of their principal activities was the basic
education of community leaders and members in human rights law. And perhaps most
importantly the pamphlet demanded the abolition of the civil patrols, model villages and Poles of
Development. CERJ explicitly wanted to give Mayas the tools and organization to end
inequality and militarization. The counterinsurgency had been about pre-empting revolution in

138 CERJ, “Document on the Unity of the Maya Peoples,” n.d., Princeton Collection,
139 CERJ, “Por Una Sociedad Justa…’Haya Paz Mucha Paz,’” n.d., Princeton Collection,
http://pudl.princeton.edu/objects/df65v9126.
Guatemala; CERJ wanted Maya peoples and others in the countryside to be able to reverse the consequences of the counterinsurgency. Civil patrols were designed to repress organizations doing exactly what CERJ was doing; the predictable result was intimidation and repression.

That the military and patrols intensely targeted CERJ demonstrates that they saw their goals as particularly threatening to control of rural communities. CERJ’s tactics were relatively effective given their level of operations and the repression they were up against. If every Guatemalan in the countryside could be taught their human rights, if every Guatemalan had a civil structure that protected those rights through linkages to national and international institutions that condemned and prevented violence and crimes, then impunity would end. Patrollers would wrest control of their lives from military command structures, and local governance could become more democratic. Simply put, CERJ was organizing to implement the constitution in the areas most affected by counterinsurgency violence. CERJ fought against the bedrock of unconstitutional military power that preserved the patrol system. Thus, examining the fight reveals the factors that allowed for the maintenance of militarization.

Patrol and military violence against CERJ was brutal because CERJ effectively documented the repression in the countryside. The reaction against CERJ was swift: by November of 1988 the organization was issuing numerous calls to national-level authorities for
protection from patrol and military violence for its members and allies. That month Amilcar Méndez reported to the Ombudsman of Human Rights attempts by a supposed member of the National Police to kill his brothers.\(^{140}\) In February 1989, Amilcar Méndez, on CERJ stationary, reported that two women from a community in the Chichicastenango municipality had been accused by two men of belonging to GAM and thus being subversives and thieves.\(^{141}\) Even before the formal creation of CERJ, in May 1988 its would-be leader Amilcar Méndez had received a death threat from the Secret Anti-Communist Army, or the White Hand, reading: “little professor [Mendez]... for years you have clearly been working for objectives of international communism.”\(^{142}\) Patrol \textit{jefes} were commonly members of these death squads or their political affiliate the National Liberation Army (MLN).\(^{143}\) The reaction was swift because immediately CERJ was effectively documenting abuses and the actual conditions under which patrol \textit{jefes}, patrollers and the military maintained patrols. Likewise, CERJ was quickly emboldening resistance to patrolling: after three months, seventy-eight villages were resisting


\(^{143}\) America Watch, \textit{Civil Patrols}, 45.
service in the patrols. By mid-1989 at least 7,000 Mayans had refused PAC service. By March 1989, 192 communities had representatives in CERJ. In November 1988, five ex-patrollers from Chuitzalic, San Pedro Jocopiles, El Quiché, came to CERJ to denounce discrimination and reprisals from remaining patrollers for their refusal to carry out the obligation. Not only were they threatened and called subversives, but an evangelical pastor rejected one man from his church for not serving in a patrol, and the mayor and secretary of the community and municipality were refusing to issue personal documents to men not belonging to patrols. In December 1988 in the same community CERJ recorded threats of death against Pedro Pérez López for retiring from the civil patrol. In the case of Patzite, El Quiché, where patrol jefe Miguel Us Soc had demanded the formation of a “voluntary” civil patrol, CERJ had intervened to note the constitutional violation and inform the central government. In each of these cases CERJ had established a semi-protective system in which, if they could not prevent forced patrol service, they were able to document it and make the case to organizations and reporters at the

145 Americas Watch, CERJ, 13.
national and international levels of media and activism. In the case of San Pedro Jocopiles, for instance, CERJ was documenting the coercive mechanisms of patrols that bled into other local institutions; if local patrols could not ensure the obligation with threats, they often reduced the individual autonomy of opposition when possible.

Many communities issued their own denunciations of patrols, employing the same language seen in CERJ documents. In July 1993, the community of San Pedro Jocopiles, where CERJ had documented abuses in 1988, issued a long denunciation directed to national officials. The patrols had not been demobilized, and in response the writer detailed the militarized conditions of the community, in 1993, as such:

The military formed the PACs, their function focuses on controlling and threatening members of communities, specifically their businesses, their [sites of religious worship], organization, and likewise [they threaten] social and cultural aspects [of community life] which constitute a violation of human rights …. Ultimately we are subjects of harassment in our human rights, popular organizations, we are accused of being thieves and guerrillas … we know perfectly well that our constitution guarantees our freedom of association, of assembly, movement, peaceful demonstration with articles 34, 33 and 26.  

CERJ had operated in this community four-and-a-half years prior, and now they were using CERJ’s same methods and language, while referencing that their work with human rights

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organizations was being threatened by patrols. This is a clear case of CERJ having helped to
mobilize a community against militarization and patrols, in part by pushing the tactic of citing
constitutional protections and human rights. The mention of the social and cultural aspects also
suggests CERJ’s influence.

The repression experienced by CERJ from its beginning in 1988 into the 1990s caused the organization to sharpen its position against civil patrols. By May 1994, CERJ favored outright abolition. The relevant document, written in English and published in May 1994, lays out CERJ’s ultimate strategy several years after it had matured as an organization, and clarified its position specifically on the civil patrols:

We, as CERJ, have demanded much more than that which was set forth in the accord regarding human rights between the government and the URNG with respect to the voluntariness of the PACs. For us, it is not important whether or not the PACs are voluntary or not: our people have been beaten by and worried about the PACs as an organization for violent and repressive military action. Therefore, our demand is that the PACs should be abolished.  

The document continues, detailing organized programs of human rights education in rural areas, recording of human rights abuses, and the offering of legal advice in cases involving human rights violations, all done or organized by CERJ. In fact, CERJ was identified by an Americas Watch report as “the nation’s first rural human rights monitoring and legal aid office.”

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151 Americas Watch, CERJ, 21.
Whereas various organizations were arguing that patrols needed to be controlled or patrollers responsible for violence brought to trial, CERJ staked out the most direct demand in calling for abolition. By directly noting that regardless of whether the patrols are voluntary or not, they had generally proven to be instruments of violence and repression, CERJ indicated the clearest way towards demilitarization and ending all the problems it entailed. CERJ countered efforts to maintain patrols in any form, as when in response to the plan of the army to convert patrols into “Committees of Peace and Development,” CERJ responded “how can they want to convert a violent group with a black history of serious human rights … into ‘peace’ committees?”

CERJ moved towards a strict anti-patrol position because patrols had proven to be the major obstacle towards accomplishing all of its other goals. Because patrols had been designed to counter any civil organizing, CERJ was always competing against them no matter what goal it was working towards that given day. For instance, CERJ had gone up against a tactic devised by the military to confuse the rural population as to their patrolling obligation. The tactic was cited by CERJ and other organizations in which members of a community would report how a patrol leader or member had told them that patrolling was not voluntary. As late as 1995 people were receiving death threats for attempting to withdraw from patrols. CERJ would then report this to the

\[152\] CERJ, “Histories, activities and demands.”
\[154\] Popkin, Civil Patrol and their Legacy, 15.
military and the Ombudsman of Human Rights. Typically, a high level official such as General Gramajo would send back a simple letter stating for instance:

this Office [the Minister of Defense], in compliance with Article 34 of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, has not issued instructions that the residents of the village of Turbala, Zacualpa, El Quiché, should be forced to serve in the Civil Defense Patrols.155

In response to being confronted with these letters, there were reports they were dismissed by local patol chiefs and military commissioners as lacking validity.156 The existence of this pattern, by no means an isolated case of legal deception by patrols and the military, in part answers why CERJ states in the document above that the voluntary nature of the patrols is unimportant. As this chapter will show, patrols had proven to be constant obstacles to CERJ’s goals of human rights education, resettlement of refugees, and the promotion of Maya ethnic rights. Yet, clearly it was not unimportant enough to keep them from sending off a complaint to the ministry of Defense for clarification about Article 34 in the first place. And while the patrols had a “black history,” CERJ worked with many of them to push for demobilization.

Comparing CERJ’s August 1988 march in Guatemala City with the CERJ document from May 12, 1994, clarifies the specific reasons why CERJ embraced the anti-patrol struggle.

Similarly, so does the link behind why the military saw CERJ as a serious threat to their projects

155 Americas Watch, CERJ, 55-56.
156 Americas Watch, CERJ, 18.
of demilitarization and control in the countryside, and responded with intense repression. As demonstrated by the Article 34 rejection tactic used against CERJ by the military, where its operatives would deny patrol obligations at a higher administrative level but refuse to intervene against local coercion, the patrols represented a way to control communities so as to keep them organizational and ideologically away from groups like CERJ. Whereas patrols had been designed to separate the rural population from the URNG, EGP, and other guerrillas, that strategic function was grafted onto civilian organizations. If CERJ could convince communities that Article 34 applied to them, the pressure for demobilization would augment considerably (and it often did); a study done in 1994 indicated that 39.8% of 10,497 patrollers questioned would leave the patrols that day if they could, with 33.4% saying they would leave when the patrol/committee dissolved and only 16.1% saying they would leave when the conflict ended.\footnote{Sylvia Gereda Valenzuela “Radiografía de las patrullas de autodefensa civil,” Siglo Veintiuno: 18 August 1994. While this source is unique in offering polling of patroller’s attitudes with a representative sample quantitatively and geographically, and the study was the commissioned by the Office of the Ombudsman of Human Rights, any responses given by potentially coerced subjects should not be considered absolutely indicative of any actual beliefs.}

As demonstrated earlier, the civil patrol obligation and the counterinsurgency measures included substantial ideological indoctrination. That ideological indoctrination contained a crucial nationalistic aspect: patrols were often forced to carry the Guatemalan flag, to participate in national ceremonies and to sing songs pledging allegiance to the nation or pledging to defend it.
As outlined by CERJ, if the Maya peoples were going to be part of the Guatemalan nation, that relationship should be guided by human rights and constitutional protections, not paramilitary institutions. CERJ wanted each community to reach that conclusion critically and freely; this offended the military because independent thought and action from a patrol went against central design of the system and counterinsurgency. Tactics of population control by definition cannot promote independent action and thought.

CERJ was a predominantly Maya organization that was ethnically focused and claimed to speak for all of the Maya communities of El Quiché. It was led by a Ladino, Amilcar Méndez, its membership contained some Ladinos, it worked with Ladino peasants and fought for the right of Ladinos to benefit from Article 34 and cease forced patrol service. However, it is clear that its major concern was the inequality experienced by Mayas and reified by the patrol system. The imposition of the patrol system had a disproportionate effect on Mayas, and in practice Ladino patrollers generally felt less coerced in their role than Maya patrollers, as discussed in chapter 1. The patrol system was maintained effectively after the nominal return to democracy in 1985 for many years for a web of reasons; CERJ’s activism and popularity demonstrates that racism towards Mayas was a tool used in the maintenance of patrols, and only by dismantling and

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158 America Watch, Civil Patrols, 21-23.
159 America Watch, Civil Patrols, 25-26.
ending paternalism, objectification and perceived malleability of Mayas could human rights be fostered in the countryside and in Maya communities. Only by pushing for “ethnic-resistance” and “ethnic rights” did CERJ and other organizations feel they could accurately articulate the reality of the human rights situation in the countryside, in which the counterinsurgency reified unequal ethnic and class relations.

Chapter 4: The End of the War and Demobilization of Patrols

With the end of the Guatemalan civil war in 1996, the government and military of Guatemala formally began dismantling all civil patrols in August of that year. However, the social and political patterns which civil patrols and militarization had created and maintained did not completely go away. Likewise, the military, the state, and former patrollers took little to no responsibility for reconstructing pre-counterinsurgency community life or investigating war-era state violence. A design feature of the counterinsurgency was the dislocation of rural and Maya life so as to destroy, weaken, and pre-empt the organizing capacity of rural and Maya communities. The persistence of violence and social dislocation in the late war years (1994-1996) and the immediate period afterwards (1996-2001) illustrate how the counterinsurgency had successfully achieved those original goals. The counterinsurgency transformation of rural life is seen in the persistent violence of patrollers and ex-patrollers

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between 1994-2001, the rural phenomenon of lynchings, and the political mobilization of ex-patrollers.

Civil patrols were trained in an anti-guerrilla and anti-subversion discourse that the military employed to target all opposition to its war aims. As such, one of the main targets for military and patrol violence was those who had fled their communities, either to become refugees in Mexico or members of Communities of Populations in Resistance (CPRs). The army viewed returning refugees as guerrilla collaborators, and felt little to no inclination to protect them during their journeys and resettlements in their communities.\(^\text{161}\) Because these people had been unwilling to submit themselves to militarization and the civil patrol obligation, they were prime suspects as guerrilla allies and subversives. Consequently, when they returned from exile or “came down from the mountains,” as the Guatemalan military often put it, they were frequent targets for abuse. In 1995, two instances stand out: in October, a crowd of refugees who had returned to their community of Xaman, Alta Verapaz was fired on by civil patrollers, who killed eleven and wounded thirty. Earlier in the same year, civil patrollers held up the planned repatriation of 300 refugees to the communities of San Antonio Tzejá and San Juan Ixcán in the northern Ixcán. The anti-repatriation forces were led by a patrol jefe and local authority Raúl Martínez Pérez.\(^\text{162}\) These two cases are indicative of patterns of patrol violence across the countryside in the mid-1990s: in the face of declining militarization and an end to war, patrols often employed violence to maintain their military-based authority.

The issue of repatriation was hard-fought. Refugees in Mexico had formed an organization called the Permanent Commissions (or the CCPP) in 1987 which coordinated plans for the return of refugees to their communities. In the case of another nearby community, Santa María Tzejá, refugees had been insistent that their return ought to come after the removal of those occupying their former lands, the abolition of the civil patrol and the right to refugee political participation.\textsuperscript{163} In Santa María Tzejá, the dissolution of the civil patrols in 1994 paved the way for the return of its refugees on May 13, 1994.\textsuperscript{164} In the case of San Antonio Tzejá, the local military commander refused to disarm the civil patrols, making it clear that violence against returning refugees was not unlikely. Furthermore, the perpetrators could possibly benefit from impunity.\textsuperscript{165} Like CERJ, many refugees understood that they could not reconstruct their lives in their communities without patrol abolition and demilitarization. The competing cases of Santa Antonio Tzejá and Santa María Tzejá show, to some extent, the importance of patrol abolition for the creation of social stability.

One of the main issues motivating patrol violence in the mid-1990s was the reign of impunity occurring simultaneously with the gradual withdrawal of military institutions from parts of the countryside. The military commissioner system which had supported local patrol power since 1982 was disbanded in 1995, but former military commissioners often maintained informal authority.\textsuperscript{166} Abusive patrols relied on the guarantee of impunity to defend against organizations working to prosecute patrol violence. In the face of a military decreasing its

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{163} Manz, \textit{Paradise in Ashes}, 184.
\textsuperscript{164} Manz, \textit{Paradise in Ashes}, 191, 270n26.
\textsuperscript{165} Human Rights Watch Americas, \textit{Return to Violence}, 3.
\textsuperscript{166} Human Rights Watch Americas, \textit{Return to Violence}, 3.
\end{footnotesize}
presence in the countryside, patrollers and soon-to-be ex-patrollers were incentivized to maintain their local authority and impunity through intimidation.

In the case of Colotenango, violence of a civil patrol against activists in CUC and CERJ resulted in a nationally-publicized trial indicative of communal tensions concerning the persecution and abolition of patrols. CUC organized the protest on August 3, 1993, with thousands of protesters and/or members of CUC and CERJ in attendance. It was held in response to the killing of three civilians at the hands of a civil patrol in the nearby community of Xemal. They demanded the end to the civil patrol. During the protest a civil patroller fired into the air to intimidate the crowd, after which, according to CUC witnesses, some patrollers fired on fleeing protestors. Three were wounded, one of whom, an elderly Maya man and CUC member named Juan Pablo Chanay, died of shock.¹⁶⁷

A highly publicized trial following the end of the war was held against the patrollers charged with responsibility for the death of Juan Pablo Chanay. Six former patrollers, in an effort of intimidation against fifteen witnesses in the case, attacked the witness Alberto Godinez on May 11, 1997, wounding him in the arm.¹⁶⁸ Demobilization had not stopped ex-patrollers from acting to secure their perceived interests, as violence by former military commissioners and patrollers was still occurring. Mainly because the case was highly publicized, in late 1997 the now ex-patrollers were taken to court. In a rare decision the judge sentenced each patroller to ten-and-a-half years in jail. It can be argued that the military, in this case, scapegoated the

patrollers, whom they had directly and indirectly forced to become agents of state violence. Many in Colotenango felt this way. That is why, on April 30, 1999, nearly a thousand people from Colotenango, led by the wives and children of ex-patrollers, broke them out of jail. They got away with it; the police never recaptured them and the ex-patrollers returned to a normal, if more quiet life after four years spent in jail. One local logic in Colotenango went that “Twelve [patrollers] times four - they already suffered forty-eight years for just one person ‘s death.” Even a member of CUC thought the verdict was somewhat harsh.\(^\text{169}\) This case in Colotenango demonstrates that in the years following the war, communities often recognized that while all patrollers were not completely innocent, they were generally not the originators of the greater conflict and atmosphere of violence.

The government of Álvaro Arzú (1996-2000) chose Colotenango for the first patrol demobilization ceremony, where the government representative openly denounced civil patrol abuse. The head of the army’s Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, General and future president Otto Perez Molina (president during 2012-2015) stated that “We don’t deny that patrollers engaged in illegal actions, but this was never part of army policy.”\(^\text{170}\) From their very first iterations civil patrols had been used to force civilians to kill, and to coerce their communities into serving military ends. The anxieties of some patrollers and ex-patrollers in the mid- to late- 1990s is properly viewed through the lens of a military apparatus scaling back its rural involvement and thus its protective relationship with many patrollers. Paradoxically, political parties such as the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), Ríos Montt’s political vehicle, built a political relationship

with civil patrols and other institutions of militarization.\(^{171}\) When the FRG won a smashing victory in the 1999 presidential and legislative elections, patrollers in Joyabaj took to the streets to celebrate and intimidate passersby.\(^{172}\) In another case, during his presidential campaign in 2003, Ríos Montt held a political rally in Mazatenango, Suchitepéquez accompanied by hundreds of ex-patrollers.\(^{173}\) After the decline of the FRG following Ríos Montt’s loss in 2003, several parties attempted to politically organize among networks of former patrollers in the countryside, including the Renewed Democratic Liberty Party (LIDER), the Patriotic Party (PP) of Otto Perez Molina, and most recently in 2015, the National Convergence Front (FCN), the party of current President of Jimmy Morales:

Jimmy Morales and his party are not the first to look towards the exPACs for electoral reasons. For almost fifteen years, the government of Alfonso Portillo, Efrain Ríos Montt and the militants of the FRG have reorganized them in order to convert them into an electoral base.\(^{174}\)

The rhetoric employed by President Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004) in wooing ex-patroller votes in 2003 played directly to nationalist discourses the military had pushed on communities and patrols during the war:

To me, the ex-PACs are heroes, because they have saved the fatherland and have aided liberty. The compensation isn’t worth much other than the sign that you all are heroes, it is recognition [of] my eternal gratitude to the exPACs of the country, which deserve all my love and the love of the fatherland.\(^{175}\)

\(^{171}\) Kobrak, “Long War in Colotenango,” 238.

\(^{172}\) Remjinse, “Civil Patrols in Joyabaj,” 467.


\(^{175}\) Rodrigo Véliz, “Jimmy apela a la vieja política.”
Ríos Montt and the FRG were extremely powerful political forces from the late 1980s to 2003. The fact that Ríos Montt was particularly popular in the places most negatively affected by the violence of 1982-1983 is partially attributable to the ideological coercion of the patrol obligation and system on hundreds of thousands of rural communities. Given that the above quote came only seven years after the end of the war, it is not completely surprising that a system which persisted for fourteen years in many places did not immediately lose social significance. However, given that in 2015 the FCN and the military-supporters of Jimmy Morales were able to play off these same social networks is a sign of the lingering legacy of militarization in the countryside, as when the reporter Rodrigo Véliz wrote before the election that “Everything indicates that the military officials of the FCN are seeking to activate the networks left behind by the FRG and PP...Today the military officials surrounding Jimmy Morales are tapping into them in order to add to their vote totals in the west of the country.”

Morales won the largest victory in a presidential election since elections began under the current constitution in 1985. The very fact that several parties have tried to tap into the civil patrol network for electoral gain speaks to their power of the institutional memories of civil patrols.

The memory of civil patrols also has remained strong outside of the electoral sphere. In her article on the memories of civil patrols in Joyabaj, El Quiché, Simone Remijnse included interviews with community members on the politics of violence and patrolling. The experiences of Joyabaj point to similar dilemmas as those in Colotenango. During her fieldwork in the late 1990s, many patrollers were being put on trial across Guatemala, and many Joyabatecos were

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176 Rodrigo Véliz, “Jimmy apela a la vieja política.”
unsure of who deserved blame for violence examined in those cases. Many Ladino Joyabatecos, for instance, rejected the idea that a Ladino patrol jefe recently sentenced to 220 years in prison was responsible for the alleged crimes. Overall, Joyabateco opinions of patrols were diverse, but generally they agreed that most patrollers had tried to avoid committing violence. Significantly, many considered patrols a source of order and stability. Perhaps more significantly, when abusive and opportunistic ex-patrollers were still in town, criticisms were conspicuously less common. Those most affected by war-era violence still feared patrols and the relations they had left behind, with one man stating that “they [ex-patrollers] are waiting to see if things will change. Because they had real power.”

Another major issue was the rise in crime following the end of the war. Community-members at times wanted to reorganize their patrols as a local method of dealing with crime, given the lack of a functioning police or judiciary system: “they informed the old leaders of the PAC … that they should organize, so that the whole community would be controlled … some communities said no … others said yes.” In this way, old patrol networks became tied to the explosion of vigilante “justice” of the late 1990s in the form of communal lynchings.

I remember how two days before I arrived in Guatemala for the first time, a 16-year old girl had been accused in the community of Rio Bravo of murdering a taxi driver. Before the girl

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177 Remijnse, "Civil Patrols in Joyabaj," 462.
could receive a trial, a crowd assaulted her and set her on fire, killing her. This was a case of lynching, a phenomenon which has increased dramatically in rural Guatemala since the end of the war. Between 1996 and 2001 alone, 235 lynchings occurred in Alta Verapaz, El Quiché Huehuetenango, and the department of Guatemala. By 2004 the number of lynchings had risen to 580. In 2009 alone there were 44 deaths and 151 injuries from lynchings. Because of the nearly complete failure of the judiciary to prosecute crime (only 2-3% of all estimated crime has been prosecuted since the end of the war) many communities feel they have had to step into the breach of security left by the state and the military. A 2002 report on lynchings linked the conditions of militarization caused by the patrol system and military commissioners to the social relations that allowed for lynching to occur. One auxiliary mayor stated plainly that “the reason for the lynchings also may be that during the time of la violencia those of the army told the people that if there was thief then they [the people] had to kill them [the thief].” Furthermore, new organizations had been created by the army and NGOs that in effect gave ex-patrollers and military commissioners new vehicles for local power. A recurrent message from communities surveyed is that “authority is held by a person linked to the military.”

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181 Matthew Creelman and Luis Ochoa, La situación comunitaria en torno a los linchamientos de las autoridades Morales como una barrera moral de prevención, Inforpress Centroamericana (May 2002): 15-16.
183 Burrell, After Lynching, 258n4.
184 Burrell, After Lynching, 244-45.
185 Matthew Creelman and Luis Ochoa, La situación comunitaria, 18.
186 Creelman and Ochoa, La situación comunitaria, 20.
187 Creelman and Ochoa, La situación comunitaria, 31.
one hand, the counterinsurgency destroyed the communal institutions in many places previously responsible for maintaining stability and peace in a given community. On the other hand, forms of militarization were not generally transformed into civil institutions to fulfill those functions. This is despite, for instance, military promises that patrols would be turned into “Peace and Development Committees.” While lynchings cannot be solely attributed to civil patrols, they are a legacy of counterinsurgency and the dislocation caused by the imposition of civil patrols as a form of violent population control.

Civil patrols have maintained a powerful legacy since the end of the civil war and their formal demobilization. Ex-patrollers' networks have had serious effects on the electoral politics of Guatemala as a whole and the dramatic increases in crime and vigilantism since 1996. These institutions guided hundreds of communities, for better or worse, during a period of extreme chaos and fear. That fear extended to those forced to support militarization in the form of patrolling. Having been used, literally, to carry out state violence, patrollers often feared for their political, social, economic, and legal positions in their communities and the nation-at-large. Ultimately, a repressive military with a powerful hold on the Guatemalan state created and drove the maintenance of the civil patrol system. Military forces unleashed a torrent of violence designed to shock Maya and peasant communities into a state of disarray and deep chaos. By criminalizing civil organizing and carrying out acts of genocide, the military created profound instability across the highlands, while it pre-empted hopes of reform and revolution which might have alleviated crushing socioeconomic and racial inequalities. Above all, the civil patrols were

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188 CEH, Memory of Violence, 30.
189 Popkin, The Legacy of Civil Patrols.
a powerful mechanism for population control that placed the highlands under siege, while forcing the population itself to uphold those conditions. The military actively planned the militarization and dislocation of rural society to achieve its war and political aims. Any analysis of human rights abuses or post-war instability in the countryside must locate the source of violence and coercion to the counterinsurgency of 1982-1983.
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