

Guatemala, the most populous and potentially the richest country in Central America happened from geopolitical reasons to be the center stage for the cold war battles in the region. After a brief ten years of democracy after the World War II, long era of military regimes followed. From the 1960, leftist guerrilla movement operated in the country with the purpose of throwing over the incumbent governments. Given the length of the contest, officially called the internal armed confrontation, that had spread across decades, both military governments and insurgents were forced to adapt to changing international situation. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Army decided the war cannot be won unless the major cause of the gerilla fight is not eliminated. This cause being one of the most extremely unequal societies in the hemisphere, the reformist part of the brass challenged guatemalan traditional landed oligarchy as to make them give up a small fraction of their hefty income to finance development in the rest of the society. The oligarchy refused, causing this part of the Army to act on their own. Headed during the first phase by Gen. Ríos Montt, young officers got rid of the existing old type of oligarchy-friendly cliqué and seized the power and government. With the prelude of very bloody contrainsurgent campaign aimed primarily at the civilian indígena/maya population thought to be the base of support for the enemy, the army decided to step down from the official political arena and crafted a process of handing political functions to civilians. Not the real power, though. The history of the country since then is the history of the transition from the authoritarian military regime to democracy as the ultimate goal was labeled by the Army. What exactly the military was thinking when talking about democracy was to free themselves from direct responsibility of governing the complicated country in the situation of economic hardship. As confirmed repeatedly by the respective theories, starting of such a process inevitably leads to activization on the part of the (civil) society that changes the process originally planned as easy and straightforward to struggle between the planners wanting to stick to the original plan and the others trying to expand the emerging room and become part of the planning. This paper shows to what extent this was true in the guatemalan case and what results were achieved since the army-led installation of the first civilian government in 1985 to the end of the 20th century.