

The socialization of civilians and militia members: Evidence from Guatemala

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Abstract

When the Guatemalan civil war ended in 1996, the Peace Accords required the demobilization of the civil patrols. Yet, nearly two decades after the end of the war, the ex-patrollers remain organized and active. At first glance, the persistence of Guatemala's civil patrols sounds like a triumph of socialization: the men enrolled in the civil patrols were effectively socialized during the war, so they continue patrolling today. This argument is seductively simple, but it is incorrect. Using process tracing to analyze historical documents and interviews with former civil patrollers, I show that the military did *not* succeed in socializing most of its patrollers. The military was, however, remarkably successful at socializing civilians in conflict zones. After enduring a ferocious scorched earth campaign followed by re-education, civilians either learned to fear and comply with the military and the civil patrols, or they internalized the military-promulgated narrative that repression is necessary to guarantee security. Both these outcomes facilitate patrolling in postwar Guatemala, where many civilians in war-affected areas either embrace or tolerate extralegal security patrolling as a means of preventing crime from spreading to their communities. Theoretically, the case of Guatemala's civil patrols expands our knowledge of socialization in militias and civil defense forces. Mass socialization of group members is not necessary for an armed group to retain its influence in the long term, even after a conflict has ended. Additionally, socialization occurs not just within groups, but also dynamically and interactively across group boundaries. To fully understand the trajectories of armed groups, it is important to analyze *both* socialization within armed groups *and* the socialization of the broader civilian population.

Keywords

civil wars, civilians, Guatemala, militias and paramilitaries, socialization

The Guatemalan civil war (1960–96) began as a junior officers' rebellion, which later evolved into a left-wing rural insurgency based in the majority-indigenous Western Highlands. The Guatemalan government responded with ferocious violence against the rebels and their alleged sympathizers. Approximately 200,000 Guatemalans were killed, and the cultural toll of the war rivaled the Spanish Conquest centuries before (Manz, 1988: 12; Green, 1999: 65).¹

At the height of the war, the Guatemalan government forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to join local

militias called civil self-defense patrols (*patrullas de auto-defensa civil*, or PACs). First organized in late 1980 and 1981, the civil patrols grew to 1.3 million men by 1984 (Schirmer, 1998: 82, 91).² From teenagers to the elderly, the military required most men in conflict zones to patrol.

By the light of the moon, the patrollers walked the streets and footpaths of their towns and villages, searching for guerrillas. The patrollers also manned

² This represented 16.87% of Guatemala's population at the time (Schirmer, 1998: 82).

¹ For more detailed accounts of the Guatemalan Civil War, see the REMHI (1999) and CEH (2006) reports, Garrard-Burnett (2010), Manz (1988, 2004), Schirmer (1998), Sanford (2003), and Stoll (1993).

checkpoints, accompanied soldiers on raids, settled disputes, and used their authority to intimidate and coerce their neighbors – sometimes for personal gain, or to resolve local rivalries. Americas Watch (1991: 31) called the patrol chiefs ‘little dictators [...] endowed with the power of life and death’. The civil patrols were notoriously abusive, implicated in 18% of the war’s human rights violations (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999: 86).

When the war ended in 1996, the Peace Accords required the civil patrols to demobilize. Nonetheless, the patrols remained ‘an alternative power structure in the countryside’ (Amnesty International, 2002: 7), and two decades later, patrolling continues. As night falls across Guatemala, clutches of men huddle under streetlamps, in colonnades, and in courtyards. They check their supplies, plan their routes, and head out on foot and in vehicles, keeping watch over their communities. And when they encounter suspicious behavior, the patrollers detain, interrogate, and punish the alleged wrongdoers. The patrollers routinely violate the human rights of their targets, beating, torturing, and even killing them.

Many Guatemalans believe that the patrollers provide much-needed security in the face of Guatemala’s postwar crime crisis.³ But the patrollers also challenge the reach and legitimacy of the Guatemalan state. They threaten and detain human rights advocates, attack mayors, and forcibly expel police, judges, and prosecutors, sometimes occupying their offices and jails, which they reappropriate for their own use.⁴ The Guatemalan state typically acquiesces to the patrollers’ seizures, ceding control of entire municipalities and creating ‘brown spaces’ that far exceed anything envisaged by O’Donnell (1993).

There are multiple, complementary reasons why patrolling continues in postwar Guatemala, including the leaders’ personal incentives and war-induced changes in local institutions and norms (as described in Bateson, 2013). In this article, however, I use process tracing to investigate how socialization has contributed to the perpetuation of patrolling in Guatemala.

In seeking to explain the structure, behavior, and trajectory of an armed group, political scientists and other scholars of socialization typically begin by looking *within* the armed group. How are members recruited and

trained? What are the norms of the group? What are the group’s incentives, and what resources do they have at their disposal?

Following this tradition, I first evaluate whether the patrollers’ socialization explains their postwar behavior. At first glance, Guatemala’s civil patrols would seem to represent a triumph of socialization: the state rapidly transformed peasants into patrollers, upon whom new identities were so strongly inscribed that they continue patrolling even decades after the war’s end. I call this the *mass socialization* hypothesis, and I find that it is both inaccurate and incomplete. In the first substantive section, I show that the Guatemalan state never seriously attempted to socialize its civil patrollers en masse – as is typical in militias and paramilitaries. Instead, the military’s treatment of its patrollers largely served to undermine their identification with the group.

Nonetheless, a less obvious process of *civilian socialization* has contributed to the perpetuation of patrolling in Guatemala. Although the military did not succeed in fully socializing all, or even most, of its patrollers, the military was strikingly effective at socializing the civilian population in the conflict zones. In the second substantive section, I evaluate the *civilian socialization* hypothesis. I show that the military targeted civilians with an intense, sophisticated campaign of psychological warfare, which was largely successful. Through the mechanisms of fear and learning, a critical mass of civilians emerged from the war either acquiescing to or fully embracing two narratives that facilitate postwar patrolling: the idea that repression is a necessary and effective way to provide security, and the claim that during the war, the civil patrols served the public good by fending off the guerrillas. Consequently, local residents often support – or, at minimum, do not actively oppose – the former civil patrollers’ efforts to reassert themselves in response to the threat of crime today.

This article fills two voids in the literature on socialization. First, it examines socialization within a local, part-time militia. Although political scientists are increasingly interested in militias and paramilitaries (e.g. Mazzei, 2009; Ahram, 2011a,b; Jentzsch, Kalyvas & Schubiger, 2015; Carey, Mitchell & Lowe, 2013), the socialization literature has primarily examined state militaries – especially those in North America and Europe (e.g. Priest, Fullerton & Bridges, 1982; Guimond, 1995; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2010). This special issue broadens that focus to consider socialization in gangs (Rodgers, 2017), informal armed groups (Fujii, 2017), rebel groups (Gates, 2017; Cohen, 2017; Hoover-Green, 2017), and – in this article – local militias.

³ On crime in postwar Guatemala, see Vela, Sequén-Mónchez & Solares (2001), O’Neill & Thomas (2011), and McAllister & Nelson (2013).

⁴ On abuses by former civil patrollers, see Sáenz de Tejada (2004), Godoy (2006), and Amnesty International (2002, 2003).

Guatemala's civil patrols can be classified as a 'civil defense force' (Clayton & Thomson, 2016), and they are readily comparable to other militias that are sedentary, defensive, and state-aligned.

Second, as Checkel points out (2017), socialization is not neatly confined to the boundaries of an organization. Instead, multiple, overlapping processes of socialization can occur during wartime. Militaries and other armed groups socialize not just their members, but the broader civilian population as well. This article documents and provides new insights into this type of layered socialization.

Data and methods

Case selection

The fieldwork reported here was conducted in and near the town center of the municipality of Joyabaj, which is located in the southern part of the department of El Quiché. Joyabaj is a rural municipality that was the subject of some of the Guatemalan civil war's worst violence, including acts of genocide and numerous massacres of civilians. In the Guatemalan civil war, the state was responsible for an estimated 93% of these human rights violations.

Joyabaj has a slightly larger town center than most municipalities in El Quiché, but it is broadly typical of municipalities in the Western Highlands. The town center features a *ladino* (non-indigenous) minority that constitutes about 25% of the population, though they enjoy outsize influence in the local economy and public affairs. The surrounding villages are overwhelmingly Maya K'iche'. In the municipality as a whole, most residents are subsistence farmers, though a sizable percentage of the town's residents run shops and provide transportation and other services. Many residents of Joyabaj also migrate seasonally to Guatemala's Pacific Coast, where they earn meager wages by harvesting coffee and sugar cane.

During the civil war, the town of Joyabaj and its surrounding rural villages had large, powerful civil patrols. Today Joyabaj is home to a well-organized security patrol called the *Guardianes del Vecindario*, or the Guardians of the Neighborhood. Many of the patrollers' activities are illegal but not clandestine. They overtly advertise their presence with signs around town, and they publicize many of their meetings and activities, even recording them for broadcast on a local television station.

I selected Joyabaj as a research site because it was a good match for the other field sites in a broader research project (described in Bateson, 2013), because local

residents were acquainted with and receptive to the idea of social science research – thanks to prior fieldwork by Remijnse (2001, 2002) – and because it had a security patrol. Close attention to this one municipality of course presents some trade-offs, which I mitigate by contextualizing the experiences of the residents of Joyabaj with primary and secondary source documents from across Guatemala.

Interviews and participant observation

While living in Joyabaj, I was 'neck-deep in the research context' (Schatz, 2009: 5). I attended meetings, church services, soccer games, and cultural ceremonies, and I observed daily activities in the municipality, the police station, artisans' workshops, schools, and other sites. I hope this participant observation permits me to write with an ethnographic sensibility: 'an approach that cares – with all the possible emotional entanglement that implies – to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality' (Schatz, 2009: 5).

I conducted 73 in-depth interviews in Joyabaj.⁵ The interviewees are identified with pseudonyms they selected. All interviews took place in October and November 2009. The interviews were open-ended life histories, with particular emphasis on events in town during the civil war, and public security – including vigilantism and security patrolling – since the end of the war. I started several purposeful snowball samples, which included networks of enthusiastic present-day patrollers, reluctant present-day patrollers, former civil patrollers who are not active today, and civilian supporters and critics of the patrols.⁶

Documentary sources

For this article, I gathered additional data on civil patrolling in Guatemala, in order to be able look for observable

⁵ Two family members participated in one interview together, so the 73 interviews included 74 subjects.

⁶ I primarily interviewed individuals old enough to remember the civil war, and my sample skewed male because I intentionally oversampled current and former patrollers, all of whom are men. I interviewed 49 men and 25 women. In addition to current and former patrollers, I also interviewed a diverse cross-section of town residents and community leaders, including priests and pastors, shop owners, market vendors, teachers, police officers, prosecutors, farmers, laborers, and retired people. The interviewees included indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. All the interviews were conducted by the author in Spanish, with very limited assistance from K'iche' interpreters in a few instances. The author translated quotations from Spanish to English.

implications of my hypotheses in data that I had not previously seen (Bennett & Checkel, 2015: 18). I considered – and ruled out – several potential sources: the CIIDH dataset,⁷ Guatemalan newspapers, and Guatemalan military records.⁸ Instead, a research assistant systematically searched English-language print media archives,⁹ the DNSA archive of declassified US government cables, and the PlusD Wikileaks archive for articles and cables that mentioned patrolling, civil patrollers, patrols, ex-patrollers, security committees, and related terms.¹⁰ She read each document and extracted specific categories of information, focusing on credible, specific, first-hand accounts. She compiled data on the patrollers' recruitment and training, their duties, the risks they faced and the benefits they reaped, their attitudes toward patrolling, and actions consistent or inconsistent with the notion that patrollers had been effectively socialized. The focus on US government cables and English-language media produces some biases, but I take their direction and severity into account when evaluating the probative value of each piece of evidence.¹¹ I also rely on

some high-quality secondary sources to test the hypotheses.

Process tracing

Analytically, I use process tracing both inductively and deductively, which is typical of the method (Bennett & Checkel, 2015: 17–18). I test the mass socialization hypothesis in two ways. First, I employ a hoop test, asking whether the Guatemalan military ever made any systematic efforts to socialize the patrollers. For a program of mass socialization to have potentially succeeded, it needs to have existed in the first place. Next, I look for observable implications of mass socialization. Is the empirical evidence consistent with the idea that all, or most, of the civil patrollers were effectively socialized? If the patrollers had been effectively socialized en masse, they would be expected to display task mastery, role orientation, dedication to their jobs, and related indicators of successful socialization (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). I search the historical record carefully for such observable implications of mass socialization, but I find the exact opposite. The vast majority of patrollers displayed, at best, mere compliance – or Type 0 socialization (Checkel, 2017) – and many acted in ways that are completely incompatible with having been socialized.

Next, I argue civilian socialization has contributed to the long-term influence of Guatemala's ex-patrollers. I show that the military and its agents aggressively sought to socialize the civilian population, and I identify two mechanisms through which socialization occurred: fear and learning. Then I look for evidence that civilians were in fact socialized during the war. I demonstrate that today, civilians in former conflict zones, including Joyabaj, express opinions and interpretations of history consistent with the military's socialization efforts. This worldview, in turn, empowers former civil patrollers and legitimates the idea that repression is an appropriate, necessary, and effective strategy to gain security. I also consider alternative reasons why civilians might support the patrols today, including material incentives, ethnic identification, and concern about crime. I show that these competing rationales cannot fully account for the narratives that local residents use to explain their support for the patrols today.

I do not have 'smoking gun' evidence of civilian socialization, so this argumentation amounts to a series of straw-in-the-wind tests.¹² As in most social scientific

⁷ The CIIDH dataset (Ball, 1999; Human Rights Data Analysis Group, 2015) is the main dataset used for quantitative research on the Guatemalan civil war (Davenport & Ball, 2002; Gulden, 2002; Sullivan, 2014), but it does not contain any information that speaks directly to socialization in the civil patrols. More generally, I have serious concerns about the dataset's quality, since it contains many false negatives – municipalities where atrocities are widely known to have been committed, but where the CIIDH records no human rights violations.

⁸ The Guatemalan military's records are not available to the public or to researchers. The military has never voluntarily released any of its records, though researchers have acquired and publicized some key documents (e.g. Doyle, 2008). Readers may be familiar with the Historical Archive of the Guatemalan National Police (Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional, or AHPN), a secret records cache discovered after an explosion in Guatemala City. Some scholars have utilized the AHPN (Weld, 2014; Sullivan, 2016), but it contains only police records, and the police had basically no role in the creation and management of the civil patrols.

⁹ Guatemalan newspapers are difficult to access, and their reporting was highly constrained at the height of the civil war – precisely the era when the civil patrols were most active. Patrollers and civilians likely felt freer to talk to foreign journalists.

¹⁰ Throughout the article I provide only abbreviated citations for the cables and news articles. Full citations can be found in the Online appendix.

¹¹ For example, US State Department employees were 'expected to shape their reporting to the overall policy the Reagan administration was pursuing in Guatemala' (Clark & Sikkink, 2013: 553). The USA tended to absolve the Guatemalan government of responsibility for human rights violations during the war, while also overstating the professionalism of the Guatemalan armed forces. Therefore, I consider most US government cables to be biased in favor of the mass socialization story. This bias is not a serious threat to inference, because it runs contrary to my argument and findings.

¹² On process tracing tests, see Van Evera (1997: 31–33), Collier (2011), Mahoney (2012), and Bennett & Checkel (2015: 16–17).

research, I can more confidently *reject* the hypothesis of mass socialization than affirmatively *prove* the hypothesis of civilian socialization – but I show that the latter argument is consistent with the historical record and the lived experiences of patrollers and civilians, and therefore plausible.¹³

Transparency

Qualitative methods are often used implicitly (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012: 7), but throughout this article, I aim for production and analytic transparency (Lupia & Elman, 2014; Elman & Kapiszewski, 2014). Most of the data used to build and test my arguments are readily accessible. The secondary sources and media sources are clearly cited and easily found in any university library, or various online media databases. The US government cables are readily available through the PlusD and DNSA online databases. Out of respect for the subjects' privacy, I am not distributing full transcripts of my interviews, but I provide many verbatim quotes that reflect the subjects' views, as expressed in their own words. This approach enhances the 'understandability and persuasiveness' of my argument (Lupia & Elman, 2014: 22) without violating important ethical principles.

Mass socialization

What role, if any, has socialization played in the persistence of Guatemala's civil patrols? I first evaluate whether the Guatemalan military succeeded in socializing its patrollers en masse, drawing on organizational socialization theory. Although based largely on the study of white-collar workers in the developed world (e.g. El Akremi, Nasr & Richebe, 2014; Ponemon, 1992; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Jones, 1986), theories of organizational socialization are routinely applied to militaries and armed groups (e.g. Guimond, 1995; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2010).

Researchers like Costa & Kahn (2008) have demonstrated that soldiers' pre-existing identities shape their decisions in wartime. Yet militaries remain the prime example of a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961): they attempt to fully socialize new recruits, treating them as though they were blank canvases. In a stylized scenario of

socialization, recruits first 'encounter' the work to be performed (Guimond, 1995; Van Maanen, 1975). The 'encounter' phase is shocking and may be accompanied by disillusionment. New recruits' levels of dedication and satisfaction often dip immediately after joining an organization. But when socialization is successful, the newcomers rebound. In the next phase, 'metamorphosis', they adopt, internalize, and embody the 'characteristic attitudes' of their new organization – and they are transformed into full-fledged group members (Guimond, 1995; Van Maanen, 1975; Hoover Green, 2017), undergoing Type I and Type II socialization, in Checkel's (2017) framework.

Did the military try to socialize the patrollers?

Particular tactics of organizational socialization can influence whether recruits actually experience 'metamorphosis', and in what proportions. The Guatemalan military was well aware of this and carefully designed intensive programs of socialization for some soldiers¹⁴ – but not the civil patrollers. To be sure, some patrollers were selected for special training or embraced their roles spontaneously. A small minority of patrollers were 'particularly enthusiastic',¹⁵ 'revel[ing] in the control and abuse of fellow villagers' (Schirmer, 1998: 95). They 'took to their task with alacrity, using their power not only to apprehend real and suspected guerrillas, but to torture, humiliate, intimidate, and kill – suggesting that forced collaboration encouraged not only complicity, but even, sometimes, enthusiasm' (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 109). By the end of the war, one cable categorized these individuals as 'true believers, very close to the Army.'¹⁶

For the vast majority of patrollers, however, the military neither designed nor implemented any meaningful program of socialization. To the contrary, the government's treatment of most of its civil patrollers actively *undermined* their socialization.

Militaries typically use formal, collective processes of socialization. Collective training builds group cohesion and ensures a uniform transfer of information. Formal training is a 'functional necessity' for new work that is 'complex, difficult, and usually entails a very high

¹³ In process tracing, hoop tests are a common, efficient way to reject theories. Smoking guns and doubly decisive tests, which would provide similarly strong evidence in favor of a theory, are comparatively rare (Dunning, 2015: 213). This negative orientation mirrors the basic logic of most quantitative analysis, in which we do not prove a hypothesis, but rather we reject the null.

¹⁴ Aspiring Kaibiles (elite special forces), for example, underwent a legendarily effective period of socialization, including hazing, remote jungle survival training, collective punishment (or rewards), and grotesque, transgressive acts, such as drinking animals' blood and raising a puppy and then killing it (Von Santos, 2008: 92–98; Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999: 25).

¹⁵ DNSA 01123; see also DNSA 01194.

¹⁶ DNSA 01615.

penalty for the making of a mistake', as is the case for 'electricians, soldiers, and machinists' (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979: 239). And indeed, the Guatemalan military sometimes gathered patrollers to march for review, to pledge allegiance to the flag, to listen to speeches, and to sing songs.¹⁷ But the rallies were relatively infrequent, and they communicated few practical skills.

When formal training occurred, it was sporadic, inconsistent, and of short duration. Many men were simply informed that they were required to patrol, without any training or orientation at all. Ex-patroller Cecilio recalls the day he was summoned to his town's convent in 1982. The military told 'the whole town' that they had to patrol. Cecilio was 'nervous', because he had 'no experience, just standing in line there'. Cecilio was placed in a group and sent straight out to patrol, with just a machete and a stick. There was 'nothing', he recalls, 'not even one training session'.

Nonetheless, most men did their best to comply with the military's edicts – a smart move, because refusing to patrol was typically taken as a sign of sympathy for the guerrillas.¹⁸ As one patrol chief explained in 1983, if someone refuses to participate, 'We ask why? Could it be that he is connected with those up in the mountains?'¹⁹ The patrollers knew well what such statements implied. As Josué told me emphatically, if you didn't patrol, 'they'd kill you!'

In any organization, newcomers typically experience some anxiety, which sequential, fixed, serial processes of socialization can reduce. In 'random' socialization, by contrast, 'the sequence of steps leading to the target role is unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing' (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979: 241). In a random process, 'a person may well learn to be only whatever the immediate situation demands' (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979: 242). 'Fixed' socialization is homogenous and uniform; the

opposite, 'variable socialization', leaves recruits unable to figure out 'just where they are, where they are going, or how they are doing'. Variable processes lead to 'maximum anxiety', keeping 'a recruit maximally off balance and at the mercy of socialization agents' (p. 246), and they are 'a very powerful antidote to the formation of group solidarity' (p. 248). Finally, 'serial' socialization occurs when more senior group members train new inductees, in contrast to 'disjunctive socialization':

When newcomers are not following in the footsteps of immediate or recent predecessors, and when no role models are available to recruits to inform them as to how they are to proceed in the new role, the socialization process is a disjunctive one. [...] Such situations make things extremely difficult and anxiety provoking for the newcomer. (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979: 247)

To the extent the patrollers experienced any socialization, it was random, variable, and disjunctive – heightening their anxiety and undermining mass socialization. The patrollers had no idea what to expect, how long they would be serving, or what promotions – if any – might lie in the future. They did not have fixed duties or expectations; rather, the patrols were 'virtual work gangs'²⁰ at the beck and call of the military. When the patrols began, there were no 'senior' patrollers to teach the younger ones, since patrolling was entirely new. Certainly military officers did provide some guidance, but contact with them was limited (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 100). 'Many of the patrols operate in remote areas with little supervision from the Army', the US Embassy reported.²¹ Even basic communication was difficult, given that many patrollers were not proficient in Spanish (Montejo, 1987), and the patrols did not have radios.²² Orders had to be hand-walked from patrols to the military, and vice versa.²³

The entire experience of patrolling was fraught with uncertainty. The patrols were only 'loosely organized'.²⁴ Schedules and duties were unpredictable; patrollers could be suddenly dispatched on week-long marches, without even being able to inform their families before they departed.²⁵ As of August 1983, the US government

¹⁷ DNSA 01185, DNSA 00805, DNSA 00797, DNSA 01123, *New York Times* 18 Nov. 1983; *Washington Post* 20 Dec. 1984, *New York Times* 10 Jan. 1985, *New York Times* 1 Sept. 1993. Such events were more frequent in model villages, but even then, the ceremonies typically involved the entire population, not just the patrollers.

¹⁸ Interviews with Abrahám, Alberto, Augusto, Benigno, Jesús, and Julián. Coerced recruitment is confirmed in nearly all primary and secondary accounts of patrol recruitment, including DNSA 00834, DNSA 01123, *New York Times* 10 Jan. 1985, *Washington Post* 18 Dec. 1991, *Toronto Star* 1 Mar. 1987, *Globe and Mail* 9 Apr. 1990, *Globe and Mail* 13 Sept. 1996, *Globe and Mail* 5 Aug. 1992, *Independent* (London) 13 Oct. 2004, *Globe and Mail* 30 May 1987, *Globe and Mail* 29 Jun. 1993, *Irish Times* 8 Nov. 2003; Montejo (1987); Schirmer (1998).

¹⁹ *Washington Post* 3 Jan. 1983.

²⁰ *Washington Post* 21 Dec. 1984.

²¹ DNSA 00960.

²² This was an intentional policy decision. An army official told a reporter, 'we can't give them radios because we would risk their being captured by the guerrillas' (*Globe and Mail* 19 Jul. 1982).

²³ DNSA 01185, 01132, 01141.

²⁴ DNSA 01006.

²⁵ *Globe and Mail* 6 Feb. 1984.

considered 'patrol leaders and members [...] poorly trained'.²⁶ The civil patrols' code of conduct was not developed until 1984²⁷ – *after* most patrollers were inducted. Patrollers were also unsure about whether, when, and how they might be paid. Commanders sometimes hinted vaguely at compensation.²⁸ 'They say they will give us something later', one patroller told a reporter in 1982.²⁹ But the tantalizing land, beans, and pensions never seemed to materialize.

Worse still, patrollers lived under the constant threat of senseless, unpredictable violence from the military or their fellow patrollers (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 103, 109). In numerous, well-documented instances, the army abducted,³⁰ disappeared,³¹ beat,³² tortured,³³ and killed³⁴ patrollers, often for no apparent reason. Sometimes the patrollers were apparently mistaken for guerrillas,³⁵ sometimes the military was trying to coerce other patrollers into providing intelligence,³⁶ and sometimes the military seemed to be punishing the patrollers for misbehavior (Montejo, 1987; Remijnse, 2002: 158). But other incidents were truly baffling, as in 1982, when

an Army unit reportedly came to San Mateo [Ixtatán, Huehuetenango], assembled the villagers, and read off a list of those selected for civil defense training. The group of selected men were reportedly to be taken in a military truck to Barillas military base for training. En route, however, the group was reportedly taken from the truck and killed by the Army. There was no explanation why the Army would kill people it was recruiting for a civilian defense force.³⁷

Perceptions of 'overall justice' within an organization are associated with more successful socialization (El Akremi, Nasr & Richebe, 2014) – and such perceptions were undoubtedly lacking among many civil patrollers.

Was the patrollers' behavior consistent with mass socialization?

Van Maanen & Schein (1979: 217) propose that outcomes of socialization can be measured 'in terms of how the individual behaves in the organizational role, not in terms of how an individual may or may not feel toward the new role'. If individuals are functioning well in an organization, and if they do not leave or attempt to leave, this is taken as evidence consistent with socialization. Obviously this is a low bar, not direct evidence of any sort of true transformation. But behaviors consistent with socialization are necessary conditions for a rudimentary level of socialization to have been achieved (see also Checkel, 2017, on Type I socialization).

Even by these minimal standards, most of Guatemala's civil patrollers look manifestly unsocialized. Many patrollers shirked their duties, appearing to comply with the requirement to patrol, while simultaneously refusing to follow orders. Even in Joyabaj, a municipality known for its tightly regimented civil patrol, I heard several detailed stories of persistent, long-term shirking. Nicolás, for example, was forced to patrol. 'But we were very astute', he told me, 'because you could seek out your group'.

Nicolás: When it was our turn, we would go make food. [...] We would go out, but then we would go to a house, secretly, and eat a chicken and stuff. [Laughs]

Regina: And that's how you passed the night?

Nicolás: We just put a lookout on the corner. So it was fun for us. [Laughs]

Regina: And the others didn't get angry about this, that is to say –

Nicolás: The others did not realize. The other groups didn't realize, no, no. It was a secret amongst us. We were a very like-minded group.

²⁶ DNSA 00960. In 1987, another cable reported that 'only now' are patrollers being properly trained (DNSA 01123).

²⁷ DNSA 01022.

²⁸ *New York Times* 18 Nov. 1983.

²⁹ *New York Times* 22 Dec. 1982.

³⁰ DNSA 00963, DNSA 01049.

³¹ *New York Times* 28 Jul. 1985; DNSA 00871.

³² DNSA 00963.

³³ DNSA 00871.

³⁴ DNSA 00845, 00843, 01262, 00871, *Globe and Mail* 19 Jul. 1982.

³⁵ DNSA 01262.

³⁶ DNSA 00871.

³⁷ The same incident appears in the *Globe and Mail* 19 Jul. 1982.

Small patrolling units sometimes cultivated subcultures that ran *contrary* to the broader mission of the civil patrols (Remijnse, 2002: 158). But subtle shirking was more common. Elias, for instance, was a patrol chief, but he was lenient with his men, routinely letting them out of patrolling if they were busy or had a scheduling conflict. He was perfectly content for his group to do rather little actual patrolling; 'luckily', he told me, they never actually caught any guerrillas. Silencio's patrolling group was similarly restrained. They were 'very, very calm. We didn't look for problems'. He recalls that a lieutenant once ordered the group to go and find a man who had

stolen a machete. But Silencio talked to his partner, and they agreed not to look for him. 'If his path crosses ours, we'll take him, but not otherwise', they decided.

Why didn't the government attempt mass socialization?

There were practical and strategic reasons why the Guatemalan government did not attempt mass socialization of its patrollers. Logistically, the patrols' rapid growth likely outpaced the military's training capacity. The ranks of the patrols swelled from less than 30,000 in April 1982³⁸ to 700,000 in August 1983.³⁹ Yet in April 1982, the US Embassy estimated that the Guatemalan government was capable of properly arming only 5,000 patrollers.⁴⁰

Racism may have also played a role. Military officers were typically higher-status ladinos from the capital or Eastern and Southern Guatemala. The patrollers were overwhelmingly indigenous highlanders. Multiple sources suggest that the military did not see the patrollers as worthy of investment, or did not trust them fully. The state feared 'Indian uprisings', and consequently, the military was 'eager to capitalize on the [patrollers'] manpower but reluctant to arm them properly' (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 101). The army was 'careful [...] to limit the weapons of patrol members'⁴¹ and 'did not like the idea of arming groups of people in Guatemala, and were thus very selective when they did so'.⁴² Additionally, military officials openly worried that equipment given to the patrollers would fall into the hands of the guerrillas.⁴³

Furthermore, it is not even clear that the primary purpose of the patrols was to increase the number of combatants fighting for the state. The patrols served several other strategic goals. First, patrolling allowed the government to keep tabs on hundreds of thousands of rural men. When men patrolled on a regular schedule, the military directly monitored their whereabouts and loyalties, preventing them from slinking away undetected to join the rebels (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 100).

Additionally, patrolling forced civilians to take a side in the war (Schirmer, 1998; Stoll, 1993). Once men had gone out patrolling, they were inextricably linked to the government. The rebels were known to carry out

selective violence against individuals who had sided with the government. So the very act of patrolling gave thousands of men across rural Guatemala a personal stake in preventing rebel incursions into their communities (on mechanisms that force recruits to take sides, see also Gates, 2017; Cohen, 2017).

Finally, the Guatemalan government consistently sought to portray the civil patrols as voluntary, autonomous organizations (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 100). This posture allowed the military to claim that the population was on its side in the war. It also provided the military with a veneer of plausible deniability for human rights abuses, a rationale common to other militias as well (Carey & Mitchell, forthcoming). A more concrete, structured program of formal socialization would have undermined the fiction that the patrols were voluntary. There were thus several reasons for the Guatemalan military *not* to attempt to socialize their patrollers.

Civilian socialization

Socialization is often studied within a well-defined organization (see also Checkel, 2017). But during the Guatemalan civil war, the military made a concerted effort to socialize and re-educate the civilians of the Western Highlands. In this section, I describe this process of civilian socialization, and I argue that the military's war-time socialization of civilians contributes to the persistence of patrolling in Guatemala today.

From scorched earth to beans and bullets

Under President Romeo Lucas García (1978–82), the Guatemalan military waged a scorched earth campaign against the rebels who had established themselves in the Western Highlands – and against the civilian population of the region. But by the time General Efraín Ríos Montt seized power in 1982, the military's top commanders had realized that a strategy of pure annihilation was not going to win the war. Instead, starting in 1982, they adopted a new strategy of destruction followed by rebirth, which dovetailed with Ríos Montt's desire to create a 'new national and military myth' (Escribá Pimentel, 2009: 175; see also Garrard-Burnett, 2010). The Guatemalan military aimed to dedicate 30% of its effort to 'bullets',⁴⁴ or finding and exterminating the rebels and their perceived supporters. The remaining 70% of the military's campaign was to focus on 'beans':

³⁸ DNSA 00814, Garrard-Burnett (2010: 101).

³⁹ Garrard-Burnett (2010: 101). The number of patrollers remained around 700,000 through 1986 (DNSA 01132).

⁴⁰ DNSA 00797.

⁴¹ DNSA 01012.

⁴² DNSA 01512.

⁴³ *Globe and Mail* 19 Jul. 1982.

⁴⁴ In Spanish, the plan was called *Frijoles y Fusiles*, literally 'Beans and Rifles', but it is commonly translated into English as 'Beans and Bullets'.

development, food aid, resettlement of displaced civilians, and indoctrination and psychological operations (Schirmer, 1998: 51).⁴⁵ Military orders declared that 'the war must be fought on all fronts: military, political, but above all socio-economic. The minds of the population are our main target' (quoted in Schirmer, 1998: 24).

Teaching and learning

In conflict zones, civilians were socialized through two primary mechanisms: learning and fear. By 1983, Civil Affairs Companies were posted across the conflict zone, where they worked through at least 1989.⁴⁶ The military's specialists inserted themselves into nearly every facet of civilian life, even teaching home economics, hygiene, and literacy,⁴⁷ as well as engaging in more predictable behaviors, like educating local residents on 'the evils of communism'.⁴⁸ They claimed to be able to win over the civilian population after as little as four or five months in a town or village.⁴⁹

In many instances, the civil patrollers joined in this work, becoming agents of socialization in their communities.⁵⁰ Garrard-Burnett (2010: 99) writes, 'it was through the civil patrols that counterinsurgency came to be woven intricately into the fabric of village life'. They 'enforce[d] military control, and monitor[ed] or eliminate[d] the ideologically suspect'.⁵¹ Patrollers also imposed and enforced rules; one patrol banned handicrafts, food aid from an international group, and Mass and catechism classes, 'labeling such activities "subversive"'.⁵²

Through these sustained, consistent practices, local residents learned that they had to comply with the rules of the military and the civil patrols for pragmatic reasons (Type 0 socialization), become accustomed to playing the roles expected of them (Type I socialization), or came to believe in the rules and rhetoric espoused by the

military and the patrols (Type II socialization). Even development workers who routinely had their homes searched by the military came to regard this harassment as normal (Green, 1999: 69). Many residents in Joyabaj shared this acceptance of wartime systems, particularly the requirements that civilians carry identity documents, stay indoors at night, and show up for patrol duty and other meetings when summoned. Like other highland residents and conscripted patrollers, they 'follow[ed] the rules of the game as dictated by the army as a way of avoiding further violence' (Schirmer, 1998: 97).

These processes of learning facilitate postwar patrolling. Because many residents became accustomed to following rules established by the military and the civil patrols, they see the present-day patrols' efforts to impose rules and control their lives as normal, unremarkable, or uncontested. The specific messages learned from the military also provide a rationale for present-day patrolling, as discussed below in the section on narratives.

Fear

During the war, the residents of Joyabaj lived in a constant state of fear. 'It was a very hard life, only with terror, with fear',⁵³ interviewees told me. 'You always had that fear',⁵⁴ 'tremendous tension, tremendous fear'.⁵⁵ The apparent senselessness of the violence made it all the more terrifying (Green, 1999: 61). Friends, neighbors, and relatives were killed, often for no apparent reason.⁵⁶

Fear interacted with learning, as civilians saw that they were justified in fearing the military and the civil patrols.⁵⁷ Thinking about the civil patrols, Michelle recalls that she was

afraid that something could happen, for whatever – sometimes if someone did not like someone else, they would stab him and tie him up and take him to who knows where, because they never came back. So you always lived with that fear.

Civilians quickly learned that it is futile to challenge authority. 'Anyone who didn't want to go with them, they'd kill them right away', Manuela says. As a cable from 1984 observed, in conflict zones the residents were

⁴⁵ In conflict zones, 'Beans and Bullets' was followed by 'Food, Work, Shelter' (Techo, Tortilla, y Trabajo), another food-for-work and aid program whose logic was similarly stark: as one colonel told Schirmer, 'If you join us, we will feed you. If not, we will kill you' (quoted in Schirmer, 1998: 58). See also DNSA 00885, *Globe and Mail* 25 June 1984.

⁴⁶ DNSA 01294, *New York Times* 4 Mar. 1984.

⁴⁷ DNSA 00968.

⁴⁸ DNSA 01132, see also *Globe and Mail* 6 Jun. 1985, *Times* (London) 16 Aug. 1989, *Guardian* (London) 7 Dec. 1985; Garrard-Burnett (2010: 73).

⁴⁹ DNSA 00902.

⁵⁰ DNSA 01783, DNSA 01089.

⁵¹ *Washington Post* 4 Oct. 1992.

⁵² *Globe and Mail* 21 Feb. 1984.

⁵³ Interview with Catalina.

⁵⁴ Interview with Alejandra.

⁵⁵ Interview with Juventino.

⁵⁶ Interviews with Octavio, Catalina, Donald, Jacobo, Karla, Erik, Domingo, Maritza, and Josefina.

⁵⁷ Interviews with María, Josefina, Nicolás, Moisés, Benigno, Augusto, Manuela, Domingo, and Ines.

‘afraid to “stick their necks out”’ because ‘their experience in recent years is that those who do have had them cut off.’⁵⁸ Silence emerged as a rational response to fear (Green, 1999: 69). These memories linger, meaning that even though some local residents oppose patrolling, they are reticent to challenge the patrollers. They are willing to criticize groups like the *Guardianes del Vecindario* only *sotto voce*, casting nervous glances over their shoulders.

In addition to fearing the former civil patrol leaders, the residents of war-affected communities also ‘whisper their fears of a return to *la violencia*’ (Green, 1999: 69; see also Schirmer, 1998: 97). Based on ethnographic fieldwork with survivors of the war, Green (1999: 60–61) concludes survivors of the war had become ‘socialized to terror’. They were constantly plagued by a ‘low-intensity panic’: the feeling that violence ‘was stalking them’ and could return at any moment. Pervasive fear meant that civilians developed heightened threat perceptions, leading them to support ongoing patrolling and other forms of public, collective vigilantism (Bateson, 2013).

Finally, as Gates (2017) observes, fear can be transformative. Living in a state of constant fear made individuals more receptive to the military’s propaganda, as they were desperate for some narrative to make sense of the chaotic, unpredictable violence surrounding them.

Military narratives and postwar patrolling

Beyond mere fear-induced compliance (Type 0) and role-playing (Type I socialization), some civilians were fully inculcated into the military’s worldview. The military’s most sophisticated propaganda emphasized two key messages:

1. the government is portrayed as at war by necessity with the support of the people, [...]
2. the guerrillas are depicted as the authors of the massacres – achieved by the Machiavellian technique of imputed blame or framing: they are the reason why we [the military] had to commit atrocities. (Schirmer, 1998: 59)

In Joyabaj, local residents frequently repeat these arguments nearly verbatim. Many refer to the entire war as ‘la guerrilla’, subtly implying that the guerrillas were responsible for the fighting.⁵⁹ For example, although it is well documented that the military killed this town’s

priest (Remijnse, 2001, 2002; Lada, 2003), several interviewees insisted that the guerrillas killed him, or that the identities of his killers remain unknown.⁶⁰ Simona and Esther both subscribe to this guerrilla-blaming re-interpretation of the war:

The military was not to blame. What they did was defend us. The ones who provoked it all were the rebels. They provoked it. What the military did was defend us. But they were ones who provoked it. [...] When the military left, we were all very sad. Because the military helped our town a lot. Anything that happened here, the military responded. I can’t speak badly of the military, because the military helped us a lot. –Simona

This is what makes me mad, now, that they cast the blame on the military – though the military came to help, to impart security! THEY [the guerrilla] were the ones committing massacres, raping people, they did horrible things! [...] The military perhaps did its part too, but it was to defend the people, and now we are asking for the military [to return]. Because they say that the police here are insufficient. –Esther

As illustrated in Esther’s comment above, local residents often move quickly from praising the protection afforded by the military and the civil patrols during the war, to asserting that the military or the civil patrols should return to protect them from crime today.⁶¹ Rony, for example, believes that his town needs

mano dura to stop crime, like in the time of the guerrilla. In the 80s they reigned in the guerrilla. The guerrilla felt pressure. The military attacked them. The people attacked them, until they surrendered. And then in that year, back in the 1980s, the guerrillas turned in their weapons. [...] They couldn’t do it anymore. Because the military, the people of Guatemala, attacked the guerrilla. The guerrilla killed many innocent people.

Tula similarly moves fluidly from praising the work of the civil patrols during the civil war to praising the current patrol, which, she says, ‘is watching over us, so we have more protection’.

Alternative explanations

How can we know that wartime socialization really plays a role in motivating support for (and minimizing opposition to) patrolling today? There are of course many different reasons why individuals might support (or say

⁵⁸ DNSA 01006.

⁵⁹ E.g. interviews with Luisa, Sebastián, Juanito, Michelle, Josefina, Tula, Rosario, Carlos, and Rony.

⁶⁰ E.g. interviews with Rosario and Luisa.

⁶¹ Interviews with Pedro, Tomás, Tula, and Carlos.

they support) security patrolling. Some are easy to dismiss, such as ethnic allegiances. The security patrols that exist today in Guatemala are ethnically mixed. In Joyabaj, the leadership is primarily ladino, but many mid-level and rank and file members are indigenous, and there is no obvious ethnic dimension to the group's choice of targets.

Material incentives are a similarly implausible explanation. To be sure, community policing groups can devolve into a means of distributing government benefits or other rents in the community. In Guatemala, however, there is no evidence that this occurs on a wide scale. To the contrary, many of the residents of Joyabaj and other highland towns are actually coerced into *paying* for coffee, gas, and mobile phone cards for their patrollers. The presence of a security patrol is actually a net drain on their finances, providing them with few material incentives to support the group.

A desire for security definitely plays a role in shaping support for the patrols in the Western Highlands today. But an embrace of patrolling is not simply a knee-jerk reaction to high crime rates. The regions of the country where the present-day patrols are concentrated are actually the safest places in Guatemala, with homicide rates that are typically under 10 per 100,000 per year. The residents of these heavily war-affected communities certainly support the patrols in part because they see patrolling as an effective means of preventing crime from spreading to their towns. Nonetheless, these views derive from the civilian socialization that occurred during the civil war, meaning that demand for security is consistent with my argument about the impact of socialization, not a rival explanation.

Finally, we might be concerned that interviewees are expressing these views not because they have internalized them, but due to social desirability bias. This is not a major concern for four reasons. First, even direct victims of the war and individuals with strong personal motivations to criticize the military and the patrols expressed these views. Second, in Guatemala it is well known that foreign researchers, especially foreign women, are often supportive of human rights and critical of the military, so my identity should have biased my interviewees *against* endorsing the military's worldview. Third, at other points in their interviews, the respondents were quite open about sharing highly personal experiences and controversial viewpoints with me. Finally, my findings are consistent with those of other researchers, suggesting that my interviewees' views are not an aberration. Garrard-Burnett, for example, concludes that 'by the end of the war, civilians [...] had fully internalized

"alternative discourses of reality"' (Garrard-Burnett, 2010: 10; see also Foxen, 2007: 215).

Conclusion

Mass socialization within Guatemala's civil patrols is not primarily responsible for their surprising durability, resilience, and adaptability. Instead, civilian socialization has played an important role in explaining the patrols' persistence. During the war, civilians feared the military and the civil patrollers, and they learned to abide by their rules – or face the consequences. Civilians also adopted some of the key narratives promulgated by the military during the war. These rationales encourage them to see the present-day patrols as well-equipped to provide security through repression today.

Civilian socialization during war is common, often occurring without extensive psychological operations or campaigns of misinformation. Yet the intensity of civilian socialization seen in the Guatemalan civil war is likely only under certain circumstances: when one side controls territory for long periods of time, sees social engineering as crucial to its mission, and has sufficient resources, personnel, and expertise to carry out a multi-pronged, multi-year campaign. These efforts will be most successful when civilians have restricted mobility, little outside information, and limited access to a functioning economy or other sources of income (such as remittances or foreign aid), rendering them dependent upon the government or rebel group for basic sustenance.⁶²

The story of Guatemala's civil patrols provides two theoretical insights. First, mass socialization is not necessary for an armed group to persist after a civil war has ended. Even if only a small cadre of group members is effectively socialized, under the right conditions, they can succeed at perpetuating the group's existence.⁶³

Second, socialization transcends group boundaries. As Checkel (2017) notes, socialization can be layered. The members of armed groups are both targets and agents of socialization – and their efforts are directed not just at their peers within the group, but at civilians as well. Despite a large literature that explains armed group

⁶² In Guatemala, the military controlled the flows of foreign aid and development assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) – though in most cases, the military was the entity that had displaced them in the first place (Schirmer, 1998: 66). As one military commander told Schirmer (1998: 75), 'development is war carried on by economic means'.

⁶³ Rodgers (2017) similarly describes a gang's persistence through multiple 'generational' turnovers.

behavior through the internal characteristics of groups (e.g. Weinstein, 2007; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006), armed groups are not closed systems: they exist in relation to the civilian population. So to fully understand the long-term trajectories of armed groups, we need to evaluate not just socialization within the armed group, but also the concurrent socialization of civilians. This has important implications in the post-conflict period. Particularly when they remain in the communities where they served, simply targeting ex-combatants for disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration (DDR) will not be sufficient to ensure that an armed group truly ceases to wield power. Like the military propagandists who came before them, peacebuilders also need to win over the hearts and minds of the civilian population.

Supplementary material

All supplemental material can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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