



*A casualty of El Salvador's civil war, the "Golden Bridge" was destroyed in an early-morning guerrilla attack.*

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## Independence and War

Central America's first act of defiance toward Spanish rule took place in San Salvador in 1811. Hoping to help San Salvador achieve independence, a Salvadoran priest named José Matías Delgado led a revolutionary movement, aided by his nephew, Manuel José Arce. Their actions were inspired by those of a Mexican priest named Miguel Hidalgo, who was active in Mexico's fight for independence from Spain.

Delgado's attempted revolt failed. He tried again—and failed again—in 1814. But his actions caused people throughout Central America to think and talk even more about the possibility of independence.

When the Central American colonies finally achieved independence from Spain, they did so almost by accident. On the morning of September 15, 1821, the last captain general of Guatemala (which still included all of Central America except Panama) met with his advisors in the government palace in Guatemala City. A rumor soon flew around the city that independence was being discussed at the palace. Crowds gathered in the plaza outside the palace windows. People cheered, sang, and roared their approval. Church bells rang out. Everyone believed that the captain general was about to declare independence.

And so he did. Influenced by his counselors—and perhaps by the roar of the eager crowds outside his windows—the captain general wrote out a

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*Manuel José Arce was elected in 1825 as first president of the United Provinces of Central America.*

declaration, signed it, and read it to the public. Central America, from the Mexican border through Costa Rica, was now independent. Spain was too distracted with political trouble at home and in Mexico to try to recapture its former colonies.

The former captain general, unwilling to turn his power over to an elected congress, attempted to join the Central American provinces to the newly formed Mexican empire of General Agustín de Iturbide. San Salvador, however, refused to become part of Mexico, and the Salvadorans, led by Delgado and Arce, declared their independence from Guatemala. Iturbide sent an army under General Vicente Filisola to subdue them, and although they resisted for several months, they finally succumbed in 1822.

In 1823, Iturbide's short-lived Mexican empire collapsed, to the joy of the Salvadorans. Filisola, unable or unwilling to return to Mexico, asked

the leaders of the Central American provinces to meet in Guatemala City to plan a new government. Although he hoped that the provinces would ask him to be their ruler, he was disappointed. The leaders met, agreed to form a federation, and ordered the general to depart.

The assembly of leaders, mostly upper-class Creoles, declared themselves a completely independent republic, the United Provinces of Central America. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and San Salvador (including Sonsonate) were the member states. They drew up a constitution that called for a federal capital and president in Guatemala City, and a president in each of the five states; it also abolished slavery but limited voting to landowning members of the upper class. In elections held in 1825, these voters elected Manuel José Arce president of the federation.

Arce began as a member of the Liberal party, which supported progress, change, and a redistribution of wealth and power. The opposing Conservatives favored tradition and wanted wealth and power to remain in the hands of the church and a few old families. Conflict between the Liberals and Conservatives began when Arce was elected and continued to trouble the federation for many years.

Soon after his election, Arce began to disagree with his party. He joined the Conservatives and tried to rule as a dictator. In response, the Liberals of San Salvador led a rebellion against the federation. Arce's troops besieged the city in late 1829. Thus began a period of political seesawing from Liberal to Conservative control and back again.

In 1830, a Liberal Honduran army led by Francisco Morazán defeated the federal forces. Morazán arrived in San Salvador as a victorious liberator, then marched on Guatemala City. Arce resigned his office. He and other leading Conservatives were forced to leave the federation, and Morazán was elected its president.

Arce tried twice to invade and reclaim Central America, once from Mexico and once from Cuba. His efforts were unsuccessful. But Morazán's presidency faced other problems: economic and social unrest in San Salvador, a Conservative uprising in Honduras, and opposition from the

church. In 1834, Morazán moved the federation's capital to San Salvador in an attempt to weaken Conservative influence. But in 1837, the Conservatives managed to make the uneducated peasants and Indians believe that the Liberal government was responsible for an epidemic of the deadly disease cholera. Encouraged by the Conservatives, the peasants and Indians revolted against the federation. A charismatic mestizo (a person of mixed European and Indian descent) named Rafael Carrera led the revolt and overthrew the state government of Guatemala.

The revolt was the beginning of the end for the United Provinces of Central America. By April 1839, all the states except San Salvador had withdrawn from the federation. Still a Liberal stronghold, San Salvador clung to the hope of reuniting the federation. But Carrera sent Conservative forces into San Salvador from Guatemala, drove the Liberals into exile, and inflicted a disastrous defeat on the remnants of Morazán's Liberal army in 1840.

That same year, San Salvador's leaders announced the formation of the republic of El Salvador, combining the provinces of San Salvador and Sonsonate. Carrera appointed his friend Francisco Malespin the first president of El Salvador, but in 1845 the Liberals regained control after a bloody civil war. The Conservatives, however, ruled again from 1852 to 1860.

El Salvador's best-known Liberal president, General Gerardo Barrios, governed from 1860 to 1863. He founded the nation's first university and its merchant marine service. He also incorporated freedom of religion into the law and promoted agricultural and industrial projects that helped modernize the country. In recognition of his importance to his nation's development, El Salvador has officially named Barrios a national hero.

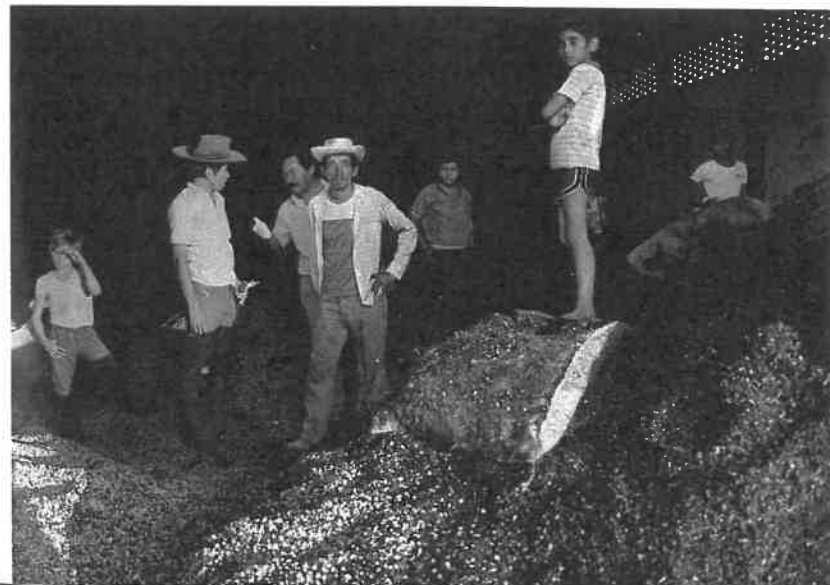
After Barrios' short, progressive presidency, El Salvador alternated between Liberal and Conservative rule throughout the rest of the 19th century. Guatemala tried twice to restore the old federation. In the second attempt, Guatemalan president Justo Rufino Barrios led his so-called federal army into El Salvador. The Salvadorans killed Barrios at the Battle of

Chalchuapa on April 2, 1885, and the United Provinces of Central America was finally and completely laid to rest.

After 1885, conflicts between Liberals and Conservatives became less violent and El Salvador gained some political stability. But power remained in the hands of a wealthy few because each president chose his successor. From 1913 to 1927, in fact, the office repeatedly passed back and forth among two brothers, Carlos and Jorge Meléndez, and a friend, Alfonso Quiñónez Molina.

One of the most important influences in El Salvador after 1885 was the growth of the coffee industry. Coffee had been introduced to the country in 1840; according to local legend, it was brought in by a Brazilian schoolteacher who missed his morning cup and planted a few coffee beans in his garden. Whether this story is true or not, coffee quickly surpassed cocoa, indigo, timber, and fruit to become El Salvador's major export product. Coffee plantations provided work for a growing number of peons, British and American companies built railroads to bring the coffee out of El Salvador's interior, and the port at La Unión bustled with activity.

*Since the mid-1800s, coffee has been a leading crop in El Salvador.*



El Salvador bombed Honduran airports and sent troops across the border on July 14, 1969. The Hondurans retaliated with bombing raids of their own. By July 29, however, the Organization of American States (OAS) had negotiated a settlement, and Salvadoran troops withdrew from Honduras.

Over the next 11 years, the two nations attempted to reach an agreement. The border remained in dispute until 1980, when they finally signed a peace treaty. In the meantime, El Salvador suffered from the loss of trade with Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (allies in the border dispute). El Salvador's economy was further strained when the 300,000 jobless, homeless, and impoverished immigrants returned from Honduras.

### Civil War

Economic troubles and a growing desire for more political freedom caused widespread unrest among El Salvador's peasant class during the 1970s. Many university students joined the workers in strikes and protests; some Catholic clergymen also spoke out against the government.

In 1972, the PCN candidate, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, won the presidential election. But his opponents claimed that if the ballots had been fairly counted, the PDC candidate, José Napoleón Duarte, would have won. Duarte supported an attempt to overthrow the Molina government; the coup failed and Duarte was exiled.

The PCN won again in 1977, when General Carlos Humberto Romero was elected. The PDC claimed that this election, too, had been rigged and the PDC candidates had been forcibly prevented from running. In the meantime, the old PAR was reorganized into the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR), a Communist-inspired group that sometimes cooperated with the PDC in protests against the government. By the late 1970s, those protests had given way to guerrilla and terrorist acts, such as bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations. The Molina and Romero regimes retaliated by forming government terrorist squads that killed critics of the government.

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In 1978, the army killed 30 protestors who were demanding land and financial aid for the poor. After this massacre, El Salvador's archbishop, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, became the government's harshest critic. From the cathedral in San Salvador, he claimed that the protest movement would continue as long as the government used violence against its people.

In January 1979, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights announced that General Romero's regime was torturing and murdering political prisoners. Violence from both government and antigovernment forces continued to grow. In October, a military junta took over from Romero and promised reforms in the areas of human rights and economic benefits. Duarte returned from exile as a civilian member of the junta.

The new government began to carry out some of its promised reforms. It took over many large farms belonging to wealthy Salvadorans, giving some of the farmland to peasants and keeping the rest as government property. But the opposition movement was not satisfied with these small measures. In addition, the police and army continued their terrorist activities. Public violence exploded when Archbishop Romero was shot and killed at the altar of the cathedral in March 1980; government opponents claimed that the army had assassinated him. The situation worsened when soldiers at the national palace fired on angry mourners at Romero's funeral. The funeral became a massacre and El Salvador plunged into open civil war.

By the end of the year, the death toll on both sides had reached 22,000. On December 3, 1980, soldiers shot four American women who were sympathetic to the guerrilla movement; three of them were nuns. That same month, guerrilla and antigovernment groups joined to form the Frente Demócrata Revolucionario (FDR) and pledged to bring democracy and social reform to El Salvador. In an attempt to end the war, the junta appointed the popular Duarte president on December 13. He declared that his regime would write a new constitution and that the country would hold elections in 1982.

During 1981, violence in El Salvador continued. More than 13,000 people lost their lives. The United States, fearing that Communist elements in the FDR would gain control of the country, provided the Duarte government with money, arms, and military advisors. The government, however, was unable to subdue the guerrillas, who preferred economic destruction to open combat. By mid-1982, they had attacked 45 bridges, 20 railway lines, and more than 650 electrical generators in rural areas.

El Salvador held elections for the Constituent Assembly, its legislative body, in March 1982. The FDR did not participate in the elections, but candidates from five parties won seats. The most powerful of these

*Voting stations, such as this one in San Salvador, help Salvadorans participate in the election process and further the peaceful transition of government.*



parties were the PDC, the PCN, and the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (called Arena), a very conservative, progovernment group. Major Roberto d'Aubuisson, the leader of Arena, was elected president of the assembly. Because his PDC party had not won a majority of the seats in the assembly, Duarte resigned from the presidency. He was replaced by a "temporary president," banker Alvaro Magana Borjo, who governed until the May 1984 elections.

In 1984, Duarte defeated d'Aubuisson to become president. Immediately after the election, Salvadoran courts tried and convicted the national guardsmen accused of murdering the American women; the officer accused of ordering the killings was freed on a legal technicality. The government ordered several other officers believed to have been involved in terrorist activity and assassinations expelled from the army or assigned to diplomatic posts in other countries.

Following Duarte's election, several meetings took place between the government and rebels, but no agreements could be reached to stop the fighting. In the 1989 elections, which the rebels boycotted, Arena won a majority in the Legislative Assembly, and its new leader, Alfredo Cristiani, became president. The guerrillas then launched a major offensive, which forced the government to participate in new peace talks.

In 1990, peace talks finally began under the supervision of the United Nations. In September of the following year, Cristiani and the rebel leaders agreed on the details of a peace settlement, which was formalized in a treaty in January 1992. In the 1994 elections, Armando Calderón Sol of Arena easily defeated former guerrilla leader Rubén Zamora to become the new president of El Salvador.





## Modern History

El Salvador's history entered a new phase when Pío Romero Bosque, president from 1927 to 1931, decided *not* to choose his successor. He wanted to give the Salvadorans a chance to elect their next leader. Unfortunately, Bosque's democratic intentions failed. Many candidates ran for office, but none of them won a majority of the votes. The legislature named Arturo Araujo, one of the candidates, president. After only a few weeks in office, however, Araujo was deposed when his vice president, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, seized power with the help of the army.

Martínez ruled as a military dictator and ruthlessly suppressed all opposition. The year after he took power was the bloodiest Latin America had yet seen—his soldiers killed more than 30,000 people (4 percent of the country's population) who objected to his tyrannical rule. Despite such violence, he was elected president in 1935 and 1939. Martínez showed little regard for human rights or for the welfare of the poor, but he did make some important improvements in El Salvador's material prosperity: he started a new coinage system, founded a national bank, completed the Inter-American Highway across the country, and continued to develop the coffee export business (which was controlled by the state). But when he tried to extend his term of office in 1944, a revolution led by students and a small democratic segment of the army forced him to resign.

During the next 25 years, El Salvador saw a rapid succession of elections and coups (military takeovers of government). Most of the country's leaders were army officers who seized power, then set out to silence critics of their rule. Their harsh regimes created unrest, which eventually grew into a vicious circle of suppression and revolt. Each new leader, in turn, was overthrown—sometimes after only days—by another. In the meantime, wealthy landowners profited from the sale of coffee and cotton, but the standard of living for the poor inhabitants of both the countryside and the cities remained very low.

This period also saw the formation of many new political parties in El

Salvador, as student and worker groups began to demand a share of political power. The most powerful new parties were the Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática (PRUD), which controlled the country from 1950 to 1960; the Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PCN), which replaced PRUD as the leading power during the 1960s; the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), which represented students, workers, and liberals and usually opposed government policy; and the Partido Acción Renovadora (PAR), which had Communist leanings. Some of these parties remain important to Salvadoran politics today.

## The Soccer War

Beginning in the late 1950s, many poor and unemployed country dwellers migrated from crowded El Salvador across the border into Honduras, where they settled on unoccupied land. By 1969, as many as 300,000 Salvadorans were living illegally in Honduras. At that point, the Honduran government began to fear that El Salvador intended to claim some Honduran territory along the border, and it ordered the immigrants out. It imprisoned several thousand before allowing them to return to El Salvador. This incident kicked off a short but bitter war between El Salvador and Honduras. It was called the Soccer War because it took place immediately after a three-game international soccer series that greatly increased the hostility between the two countries.



*In the 1980s, President José Napoleón Duarte struggled to balance the demands of right-wing elements and left-wing insurgents.*