Guerrilla Movements in Latin America: A Comparative Case Study
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Objective & Research Question
This research will look at twentieth century guerrilla movements in Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru and analyze their effects on the countries’ politics in the twenty-first century.

How did the outcome of these guerrilla movements differ based on each country’s political background?

Is there a direct link between the effects of guerrilla movements and a country’s politics?

Hypothesis
There is a link between the extent of a guerrilla’s involvement in the countries being studied and the countries’ level of democracy.

Background
• Colombia: The FARC and ELN emerged in the 1960s after La Violencia (1948-58), a period of political violence. The FARC was formed as a communist movement in 1964 from a peasant uprising for rural land rights. Later, FARC broke with the Communist Party and became an independent revolutionary organization. By the 1990s, the FARC became the country’s largest insurgent group and most powerful guerrilla movement.

• El Salvador: The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (in Spanish Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberación Nacional), FMLN, was formed in 1980 and made up of five leftist groups. Together they were fighting against Salvadoran government after they failed to improve living standards and tensions built up between farmers and the elite class. This all led to the Salvadoran Civil War.

• Peru: The Shining Path (in Spanish Sendero Luminoso) was a Maniáist-based guerrilla formed in the late 1960s by university professor Abimael Guzman. The movement’s strategy was to use violence to bring down Peru’s government and elites. Their efforts resulted in significant human rights violations.

Results
• Colombia: Violence was halted in 2016 by a peace process between the government and the FARC leaders. As a part of the deal, the FARC handed in weapons and demobilized while the majority of the former fighters were granted amnesty. In 2017, FARC became a political party and was to compete in the next year’s election.

• El Salvador: Once the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed, the Salvadoran Civil War came to an end. One of the main victories was to overthrow the dictatorship, give civil rights to citizens and become a political party in the Salvadoran government.

• Peru: Research shows that after the Shining Path’s General was captured in 1992, Peru witnessed a decline in assassinations by the group. After being captured, Guzman tried to call for a peace deal that ultimately failed. Since then, the Shining Path hasn’t experienced the same success in its goals as it did when the group was first established, yet still has a quiet presence in Peru.

Conclusion
Based on the research done, it can be gathered that guerilla movements played an important part in the politics of the studied countries. The extent of a movement’s success differed for each country; not all of the movements studied were considered successful in accomplishing their goals. Other guerrilla movements in Latin America only constituted a portion of what affected the country’s democracy. A comprehensive approach where other factors are taken into consideration is necessary in order to accurately infer what affects a country’s democracy.

Data & Methodology
This research examined scholarly sources, news articles, data from NGOs, memoirs of hostages, and interviews with former revolutionary members in Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru in order to understand the influence of the movements.

Data from Freedom House, a non-governmental organization, uses a methodology that is derived from the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Bibliography


