
Timeline: Guatemala

A chronology of key events:

1523-24 - Spanish adventurer Pedro de Alvarado defeats the indigenous Maya and turns Guatemala into a Spanish colony.

1821 - Guatemala becomes independent and joins the Mexican empire the following year.

1823 - Guatemala becomes part of the United Provinces of Central America, which also include Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

1839 - Guatemala becomes fully independent.

1844-65 - Guatemala ruled by conservative dictator Rafael Carrera.

1873-85 - Guatemala ruled by liberal President Justo Rufino Barrios, who modernizes the country, develops the army and introduces coffee growing.

1931 - Jorge Ubico becomes president; his tenure is marked by repressive rule and then by an improvement in the country's finances.

1941 - Guatemala declares war on the Axis powers.

1944 - Juan Jose Arevalo becomes president following the overthrow of Ubico and introduces social democratic reforms, including setting up a social security system and redistributing land to landless peasants.

1951 - Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman becomes president, continuing Arevalo's reforms.

1954 - Land reform stops with the accession to power of Colonel Carlos Castillo in a coup backed by the US and prompted by Arbenz's nationalization of plantations of the United Fruit Company.

1963 - Colonel Enrique Peralta becomes president following the assassination of Castillo.

1966 - Civilian rule restored; Cesar Mendez elected president.

1970 - Military-backed Carlos Arena elected president.

1970s - Military rulers embark on a program to eliminate left-wingers, resulting in at least 50,000 deaths.

1976 - 27,000 people are killed and more than a million rendered homeless by earthquake.

1981 - Around 11,000 people are killed by death squads and soldiers in response to growing anti-government guerrilla activity.

1982 - General Efraim Rios Montt gains power following military coup.

1983 - Montt ousted in coup led by General Mejia Victores, who declares an amnesty for guerrillas.

1985 - Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo elected president and the Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party wins legislative elections under a new constitution.

1989 - Attempt to overthrow Cerezo fails; civil war toll since 1980 reaches 100,000 dead and 40,000 missing.

1991 - Jorge Serrano Elias elected president. Diplomatic relations restored with Belize, from whom Guatemala had long-standing territorial claims.

1993 - Serrano forced to resign after his attempt to impose an authoritarian regime ignites a wave of protests; Ramiro de Leon Carpio elected president by the legislature.

1994 - Peace talks between the government and rebels of the Guatemalan Revolutionary National Unity begin; right-wing parties win a majority in legislative elections.

1995 - Rebels declare a ceasefire; UN and US criticize Guatemala for widespread human rights abuses.

End of civil war

1996 - Alvaro Arzu elected president, conducts purge of senior military officers and signs peace agreement with rebels, ending 36 years of civil war.

1998 - Bishop Juan Gerardi, a human rights campaigner, murdered.

1999 - UN-backed commission says security forces were behind 93% of all human rights atrocities committed during the civil war, which claimed 200,000 lives, and that senior officials had overseen 626 massacres in Maya villages.

2000 - Alfonso Portillo sworn in as president after winning elections in 1999.

2001 December - President Portillo pays \$1.8 million in compensation to the families of 226 men, women and children killed by soldiers and paramilitaries in the northern village of Las Dos Erres in 1982.

2002 September - Guatemala and Belize agree on draft settlement to their long-standing border dispute at talks brokered by Organization of American States (OAS). Both nations will hold referendums on draft settlement.

2003 November - Presidential elections go to second round. Former military leader Efraim Rios Montt trails in third place accepts defeat.

2003 December - Conservative businessman Oscar Berger - a former mayor of Guatemala City - wins presidential election in second round.

Guatemala - along with Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras - agrees on free-trade agreement with US.

2004 May - Former military leader Efraim Rios Montt placed under house arrest.

2004 May/June - Major cuts to the army; bases are closed and 10,000 soldiers are retired.

2004 July - \$3.5 million in damages paid to victims of civil war. Move follows state's formal admissions of guilt in several well-known human rights crimes.

2004 September - Deadly clashes as police try to evict around 600 squatters from private farm. Eleven people are killed.

2004 December - UN mission, set up to monitor post-civil war peace process, winds up. But UN says Guatemala still suffers from crime, social injustice, and human rights violations.

2005 March - Government ratifies Central American free trade deal with US amid street protests in capital.

2005 October - Hundreds of people are killed as Tropical Storm Stan sweeps through, triggering landslides and floods.

2005 November - Guatemala's leading anti-drugs investigator is arrested in the US on charges of drug trafficking.

2006 July - A Spanish judge issues a warrant for the arrest of former military leader Efraim Rios Montt and other former officials over atrocities committed during the civil war.

2006 December - Government and the UN agree to create a commission - to be known as the CICIG - to identify and dismantle powerful clandestine armed groups.

2007 February - Three El Salvador politicians and their driver are murdered near Guatemala City. These were members of the Central American Parliament, based in the capitol.

2007 May - Guatemala ratifies an international adoption treaty, committing to make sure babies aren't bought or stolen.

2007 July - Amnesty International urges the government to ratify the CICIG as a first step towards tackling the culture of impunity it says has contributed to Guatemala's soaring murder rate.

2007 August - International election monitors say they are worried about the high murder rate among political candidates and activists in the run-up to the 9 September polls.

2007 November - Alvaro Colom of the center-left National Unity of Hope Party wins presidential elections with nearly 53 percent of the vote.

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