

prends toujours beaucoup de temps. Les défis quotidiens se trouvent augmentés, dans le cas de la RCELAC, par le caractère multilingue de la *Revue* aussi bien que par l'effort continue de maintenir la solvabilité. Toutefois, en tant que rédacteur en chef j'ai le bonheur de compter sur une équipe de rédaction de compétences supérieures qui travaille sans relâche. La direction de la gestion est toujours assurée par José del Pozo. Se joignant à lui se trouvent Patricia Chuchryk, nouvelle responsable des recensions, et Ann-Marie Anie, assistante au directeur. Il ne faut pas omettre le comité de rédaction qui compte aussi bien des personnes connues que des nouvelles.

La sélection du contenu qui se trouve dans ce numéro (y compris l'article dont je suis l'auteur avec Jean Daudelin) s'est faite sous l'oeil vigilant d'Yvon Grenier, ancien rédacteur. J'assume, cependant, toute responsabilité pour les erreurs introduites durant la rédaction, si en effet il y en a. De plus, je vous prie, chers lecteurs, de me faire connaître vos avis sur la qualité de la *Revue*, et vos suggestions en ce qui concerne l'amélioration du contenu. Elle est en fin de compte votre revue, à vous les membres de l'ACELAC. Il nous faut oeuvrer ensemble pour que l'elle atteint tout son potentiel.

"Low Intensity Warfare, High Intensity Death: The Demographic Impact of the Wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua." With Vincent McElhinny. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 42, 1996, pp. 211-241.

LOW-INTENSITY WARFARE, HIGH-INTENSITY DEATH: THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACT OF THE WARS IN EL SALVADOR AND NICARAGUA¹

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Abstract. How violent were the recent civil wars in El Salvador (1980-91) and Nicaragua (1975-90)? Throughout both wars, the estimates of war-related deaths are highly varied and the issue of combatant and non-combatant deaths served a critical political purpose in generating or mollifying support for government and insurgent forces. As the presentation and analysis of the available data on war-related deaths will show in this article, actual counts are highly contested from year to year, and variation in estimates hinge on controversial definitions of combatant versus non-combatant and other ambiguities within the politics of human rights measurement. Few studies have gone beyond the summaries of reported war-related deaths in attempting to disaggregate and specify the demographic impact of the wars. Using recent survey data from both Nicaragua and El Salvador, this study finds that ideology had a strong impact on who died in El Salvador although almost none in Nicaragua. In El Salvador the extreme left suffered a far higher proportion of casualties than those in the centre or right. No such pattern is uncovered in Nicaragua. The implications of these findings for postwar reconciliation are discussed.

Résumé. À quel point furent violentes les guerres civiles du Salvador (1980-1991) et du Nicaragua (1975-1990)? L'évaluation du nombre de morts relié aux guerres varie énormément et la question de la mort des combattants et des non-combattants a été utilisée dans un but critique et politique pour stimuler ou modifier l'aide pour le gouvernement et les forces révolutionnaires. Dans cet article, la présentation et l'analyse des données disponibles sur les morts reliées à la guerre montrent que les chiffres sont contestés d'une année à l'autre, et que les variations dans les estimations dépendent

des définitions controversées entre combattants et non-combattants et d'autres ambiguïtés au sein des mesures politiques des droits humains. Peu d'étude ont vu au-delà de la diffusion du nombre de morts relié à la guerre en essayant de définir et de spécifier l'impact démographique des guerres. Cet article utilise des données de sondages récents du Nicaragua et du Salvador et note que l'idéologie avait un fort impact sur l'indication de qui était mort au Salvador et presque aucun sur l'explication de qui était mort au Nicaragua. Au Salvador la population de l'extrême gauche a connu un beaucoup plus grand nombre de blessés que ceux du centre ou de la droite. Les mêmes faits ne sont pas connus pour le Nicaragua. L'article élabore sur les implications de ces faits quant à la réconciliation après-guerre.

How violent were the recent civil wars in El Salvador (1980-91) and Nicaragua (1975-90)?² The summaries of estimated war-related deaths are shown in Tables 1 and 2 for both countries. The estimates are wide and varied, largely because both conflicts warranted regular news coverage and legislative debate in the U.S., often raising the same questions that were asked during the Vietnam War relating estimates of body counts and the level of U.S. involvement. Throughout both wars, the issue of combatant and non-combatant deaths served a critical political purpose in generating or mollifying support for government and insurgent forces. As the presentation and analysis of the available data on war-related deaths will show, actual counts are highly contested from year to year, and variation in estimates hinge on controversial definitions of combatant versus non-combatant and other ambiguities within the "politics of human rights measurement."³

The reliability of the data is questionable for several reasons. First, they were collected under highly politicized conditions. Second, the counts are incomplete. Third, the methodologies used to collect the data are not consistent. For all of these reasons, conclusions drawn from these estimates should be used only with great care. The first section of the study attempts to substantiate several of the competing estimates of war-related casualties that were published during both the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan conflicts. Until more reliable estimates become available, the figures summarized in Tables 1 and 2 are useful in framing the preliminary qualitative comparison of the conflict intensity based on the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan survey data that follows in the next section. Based upon these findings, finally, we speculate on the prospects for sustained democracy in the two countries.

Comparative Background

How violent was the Salvadoran Civil War? If we accept the commonly cited estimate of 75,000 total war-related deaths, for an average population during the decade 1980-91 of 4.9 million, one in every 66 Salvadorans perished in war-related violence.⁴ Similarly, in Nicaragua an estimated 80,000 combatants and non-combatants perished in the Civil War and the subsequent Contra War, meaning that approximately one of every 38 Nicaraguans died. The Salvadoran and Nicaraguan conflicts were two of the more destructive conflicts in terms of loss of human life, compared with the Iran-Iraq War, where the ratios were 1:60-100 for Iran, and 1:50 for Iraq. They were far more violent than was World War II for the United States, the country that has labeled the conflicts in Central America "low-intensity wars." The United States lost 362,561 soldiers during the war out of a population of 140 million, or a ratio of 1:387, compared with 1:66 in El Salvador and 1:38 in Nicaragua.

In terms of a broader, international perspective, however, even as destructive as the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan wars were, other recent conflicts, both past and present, have been much worse. A comparison of the magnitude of human loss in recent conflicts is shown in Table 3. The ratio for Mozambique for the conflict of 1976-92 was 1:13-33. The Angola conflict of 1975-91 was worse: 1:20-25 people lost their lives. East and Southeast Asia have experienced three devastating conflicts beginning with the Korean War where one of every seven North Koreans died, compared with a 1:49 ratio for South Koreans. Vietnam suffered massive losses in the period 1960-75, estimated to have run as high as 1:10-15. The level of human destruction in Cambodia in the 1970-80s was astronomically high, with a ratio of 1:2.5-3. Rwanda with 1:7.5-15 as of 1994, is one recent case. Certainly high-death wars are not exclusive to Third World countries. The U.S. loss ratio in its own Civil War (1865) was 1:55. In World War I, one of every 12 Serbs, 28 French and 30 Germans perished. Likewise in World War II, the ratios for Poland (1:5), Yugoslavia (1:10) and the Soviet Union (1:10) reflect an intensity of conflict in excess of the recent Central American wars. Moreover, if ethnicity is compared with nationality, the magnitude of the loss of Jewish life during World War II exceeds all other national estimates (1:1.5). Only the Allied bombing of Hiroshima produced a comparable civilian death ratio, at 1:1.8.⁵

Nonetheless, the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan conflicts rank as two of the costliest in recent Latin American history, compared with the 1932 *Matanzain* in El Salvador where one in every 48 Salvadorans perished, and the Mexican Revolution where one in 10 died.

TABLE 1

Summary of Estimated Civilian and Military Deaths during the Salvadoran Civil War, 1979-91

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
1. Civilian deaths	(9,825 + 1,476 ^a) ⁴ 14,343 ³ 11,903 ⁸	16,357 ³ (6,116-13,353) ⁷	12,547 ³ 5,339 ⁹ 5,962 ⁸	5,826 ³ 5,569 ⁸	2,860 ³	1,832 ¹² 1,543 ³ (335-2,287) ²⁰
2. Combat deaths	(658f + 3,477F) ⁴	(500f + 801F) ⁷	1,200F ⁷ 953F ^{5b}	1,298F ^{5b} (4,316f + 1,693F) ⁷ 774f ⁴	334f ¹⁹	749F ²⁰ (1,034f + 426F) ⁷ (1,123f + 397F) ²⁰
3. Disappearances	979 ¹	927 ¹	1,177 ¹	526 ¹	196 ¹ 205 ³	185 ³ 81 ¹²
4. Yearly total civilian and combat losses (1 + 2 + 3)	9,600 ¹⁶ 14,713 ¹	5,328 ¹⁶ 17,303 ¹	8,494 ^{5,8c} 13,794 ¹		552 ¹⁶ 2,402 ¹	
Min. ^c	16,415	8,344	7,469	8,167	3,399	1,980
Max. ^c	19,457	18,585	14,924	12,361	3,399	3,992
5. Cumulative total			42,000 ⁷	47,000 ⁷	43,794	45,774
Min. ^c	16,415	24,759	32,228	40,395	43,794	45,774
Max. ^c	19,457	38,042	52,966	65,361	68,726	72,718

f Refers to FMLN deaths.

F Refers to Salvadoran Armed Forces (FAS) deaths.

- Refers to right-wing paramilitary forces (ORDEN) members, distinguished from other combatants, but considered here as civilians.
- Total may include some wounded in action.
- Calculated total based on adding lowest and highest possible combinations of column estimates.
- Calculated total based on adding lowest and highest possible combinations of row estimates.
- Source estimates that 80 percent or 60,000 of total deaths were civilians.

Sources:

- 1984 Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (CDHES) report, cited in John Booth and Thomas Walker, *Understanding Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989), pp. 79-85, 157. CDHES reports cited in E. Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 190, show that political murders rose from a yearly average of 14 between 1972-77, to 299 in 1977-78, 1,030 in 1979, 8,024 in 1980 and 13,353 in 1981. The Government of El Salvador's own tally of violent deaths (defined as homicides and other

1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	Total
1,821 ³	1,415 ³	1,891 ³	432 ¹⁴	1,323 ³	1,035 ³	36,988 (min.)-65,161(max.) ^d
1,091 ¹²		301 ¹⁴ 261 ¹⁵	3,713 ³ [193 + (250-500)] ¹⁵			40-50,000 ⁶ 67,390 ³ 5,287 ¹⁰
(900f + 459F) ²¹	(1,004f + 470F) ²¹ (809f + 500F) ⁷ (459F + 900f) ¹³	(1,111f + 455F) ⁷ 826f ¹⁴	(401f + 600F) ¹⁵ (784f + 208F) ⁷ (1,902f + 446F) ¹⁸	852 ¹⁸		10,360F(max.) 12,274f(max.) ^d 30,000F ²² 14,000F ¹¹ (23,840f + 9,140F) ¹⁰
39 ¹² 213 ³	213 ³	253 ³	293 ³	164 ¹	157 ³	5,292 ^d 37,907 ¹⁰
2,663 3,393	2,937 3,102	1,795 3,725	1,628 6,354	2,339 2,339	1,192 1,192	55,000 ² 75,000 ⁷
				73,000 ^{7c}		
48,437 76,111	53,374 79,213	53,169 82,938	54,797 89,292	57,136 91,631		58,328 92,823

unexplained violent deaths), reported in official statistical abstracts (*Anuario Estadístico*, various years) increased from normal background levels of an average of 864 murders per year during 1965-66, to 1,837 murders in 1977, then skyrocketed to 11,471 violent deaths in 1980 (cited in Booth and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, p. 171).

- U.S. State Department, estimate based upon a summary of monthly "grimgrams" between 1980-92, which were tallied and issued in an unclassified cable in 1992. Phone interview, Central America desk officer, May 1994.
- CDHES, *Población Civil Asesinada* (1986, 1990, 1991); *Población Civil Desaparecida* (1991). Sources include personal interviews and press reports (*Prensa Gráfica*, *El Diario de Hoy* and *Diario El Mundo*). For civilian deaths estimated between 1979-86, approximately 68 percent were noted as "unidentified." However, all cited deaths are considered civilian victims of the conflict.
- Raúl Manaut Bentez, *La Teoría Militar y la Guerra Civil en El Salvador* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1989), p. 250, citing Ricardo M. Córdova, "Los hechos armados en El Salvador durante 1980: proceso de constitución en dos fuerzas beligerantes," paper presented at the XIV Congreso Latinoamericano de Sociología, Puerto Rico, October 1981.

TABLE 1—Continued

5. *Estudios Centro Americanos (ECA)* 425 (March 1984): 180, cited in Benitez, *La Teoría Militar*, p. 343. Sources are FMLN Radio Venceremos reports which estimate *muertos* (killed in action), *heridos* (wounded in action) and *bajas* (casualties whose final condition is unknown). The range of estimated combat deaths for 1982 and 1983 are *muertos* and *muertos plus bajas* for the low and high ends, respectively.
6. Tom Barry, *El Salvador: A Country Guide* (Albuquerque, NM: Inter-American Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1990), p. 42. See discussion on the politicization of human rights statistics and the credibility of various organizations.
7. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), pp. 1173-1177. The original source for the estimate of civilian deaths in 1981 is based entirely upon local newspaper reports. However, estimates for FMLN and FAS combat deaths are not given, although presumably they are FAS estimates. For example in 1981 the Army claimed that FMLN combat deaths outnumbered FAS deaths by 15 to one, a highly implausible claim. Combat death estimates are provided for various calendar years, although the estimate for 1988 is for the period between June 1988 and June 1989. It is interesting to note the variation in the estimates of combat deaths depending on the source.
8. Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, "Arzobispo Oscar A. Romero," *Informe 11* 9, 11 (February 1984), cited in *Los Refugiados Centroamericanos* (Mexico: Universidad para la Paz-Universidad Nacional, 1984), p. 25. This source explicitly defines the victims identified as civilians who were murdered under conditions of political violence. However, the listed totals are noted as incomplete due to constrained investigative capacity. The report states that "las cifras que exponen el documento de referencia, no representan necesariamente el total de víctimas civiles fallecidas por causa del conflicto pues [. . . en dichos cuadros no aparecen los datos de miles de muertos de la población civil ocurridos en fuego cruzado, en masacres, bombardeos indiscriminados de la fuerza aérea, lanzamiento de artefactos en lugares públicos o de diversión . . .] lo cual hace suponer que el número de civiles fallecidos sea mucho mayor al que se consigna en el informe citado."
9. Americas Watch Committee and the American Civil Liberties Union, *Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1983), p. 6, referencing reports from Tutela Legal.
10. Press release by FAS estimating civilian and military deaths in the war between January 1981 and 1991, cited in Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror: Human Rights since the Assassination of Archbishop Romero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). The Salvadoran Defense Minister, who announced the FAS estimates, stated that other figures are "purely speculative."
11. Fundación 16 de Enero, personal communication, September 1995.
12. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *El Salvador—Human Rights Dismissed* (New York: LCHR, 1986), p. iii. Sources referenced are from Tutela Legal, which notes that all estimates of FAS for the civilian population were not investigated *in situ*.
13. *ECA* 465 (July 1987): 481. This estimate is for the period between June 1986 and June 1987, adding that in addition to combat deaths, the FMLN suffered 715 wounded in action and the FAS suffered 2,234 wounded casualties. On the surface this estimate may reveal that the FAS experienced a greater proportion of wounded casualties than the deaths, but the authors point out that it is unusual for the FMLN or any army to have more combat deaths than wounded.

TABLE 1—Continued

14. *ECA* 443-444 (January-February 1989): 127; UCA Centro de Información, Documentación y Investigación. Source is CIDAI for FMLN deaths. FMLN Radio Venceremos reports of FAS *bajas* (casualties) for 1985-88 are 6,084, 6,151, 6,079 and 7,230, respectively. Although these reports do not indicate the proportion of the FAS *bajas* who survived, if the estimate in note 13 is any referent, it is plausible that as many as one fifth, or approximately 1,200 of those, are deaths.
15. James Golden, *A Year of Reckoning* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), referencing reports from Tutela Legal for the 193 civilian deaths between January and October, and the U.S. State Department for the estimate of 250-500 civilian deaths during the November Offensive. This report cites a total of 70,000 casualties for the entire civil war.
16. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores-El Salvador, *Los Derechos Humanos y Las Libertades Fundamentales en El Salvador* (San Salvador: MRE, 1986). Description of statistics cited as deaths related to political violence. It is unclear whether this includes military related deaths.
17. Americas Watch, *Carnage Again: Preliminary Report on Violations of the Laws of War by Both Sides in the November 1989 Offensive in El Salvador* (New York: AW, 1989).
18. Informe de la Comisión de la Verdad 1992-93, *De La Locura a la Esperanza: La Guerra de 12 Años en El Salvador* (San Salvador: Ediciones del Frente, 1993), p. 52. Source for military deaths is Defence Minister E. Ponce. Figure for 1990 does not discriminate between civilian and FMLN deaths.
19. *ECA* 429-430 (July-August 1984): 578-579. Source for FMLN deaths is the FAS Public Relations Agency (COPREFA), taken from newspaper articles, for first four months.
20. *ECA* 447-448 (January-February 1986): 102. This article compares a summary of 1985 human rights violations and war-related deaths for Tutela Legal, Socorro Jurídico, CDHES, U.S. Embassy and CDH (the governmental human rights agency). Total deaths due to war-related violence were as follows: 3,036 (TL), 1,714 (SJ), 1,995 (CDHES), 1,885 (U.S.), 1,810 (CDH). The biggest discrepancies, over and above the total number of deaths recorded by each agency, involved the number of FMLN combatant deaths—1,123 (U.S.) and 1,081 (CDH), while the other three agencies reported no FMLN deaths (which perhaps reflects the policy of reporting only civilian deaths). Conversely, civilian population deaths—listed as assassinations by death squads, FAS, civil defense groups or deaths caused by indiscriminate attacks and military operations—ranged between 1,573 and 2,187 for the non-governmental human rights agencies, but only 154 for CDH and 335 for the U.S. Embassy. These figures highlight the definitional distinction between governmental and non-governmental groups that probably distorted the estimates for many of the years. The distinction between FMLN combatants/civilians was unclear for CDH and U.S. estimates, implying that most civilians killed in conflict zones were presumed to be combatants, or that civilian deaths were not recorded by these two agencies.
21. *ECA* 471-472 (January-February 1988): 32. Source for FMLN combat deaths is COPREFA.
22. *Envío* (Managua), January 1989, p. 5.

TABLE 2

Summary of Estimated Civilian and Combat Deaths during the Nicaraguan Civil and Contra Wars (1975-90)

Death estimates	Civil War (1975-79)	Contra War (1980-90)	Total
Civilian		3,935	3,935 ⁵
Combat	10-35,000 ¹ 50,000 ² 30-50,000 ³	30,000 ¹ 25,500 ² 20,000 ³ 28,000 ⁴	30,000- 80,000
Cumulative total			
Minimum	10,000	23,935	33,935
Maximum	50,000	33,935	83,935

Sources:

1. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), p. 1169. Most war-related deaths came in the FSLN final seven-week offensive in 1979, when as many as 20,000 Nicaraguans died, mostly non-combatants. An estimated 100,000 Nicaraguans were wounded in the Civil War. The estimate of 30,000 deaths during the Contra War is based on 1989 data, thus he notes that the final toll was considerably higher.
2. Holly Sklar, *Washington's War on Nicaragua* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), pp. 35, 393-394. By March 1988, Sklar notes that the death toll for the Contra War had reached 25,500. John Booth and Thomas Walker, *Understanding Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989), p. 61, also arrive at a figure of 50,000 for the Civil War and add that by 1985 the Contras had caused 13,000 deaths. By 1989, they report the Contra death toll at 26,000.
3. U.S. Government, *Nicaragua: A Country Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government, 1994), pp. 73-74. Although a range of civil war-related deaths is provided in one section of the book, a second reference to 50,000 deaths is made on p. 39.
4. Ministerio de la Presidencia, January 1990, cited in Orlando Nuñez, ed., *La Guerra en Nicaragua* (Managua: Centro para la Investigación, Promoción y el Desarrollo Rural y Social [CIPRES], 1991), p. 258. *Envío* (Managua), January 1989, pp. 12-16, reports that the Contra War had so far caused 28,000 Nicaraguan deaths, compared with 3,000 killed between 1974-77, and 50,000 during the 1978-79 insurrection. *Envío*, February 1989, p. 10, Ministry of Defence reports 5,133 Contra deaths and 1,163 EPS-DGSE deaths, compared with 2,226 Contra deaths and 611 EPS-DGSE deaths in 1988.
5. Myrna Santiago, "Human Rights and Foreign Aggression in Nicaragua," *CNPPDH Report*, 9 December 1988, reports that between January 1980 and 31 August 1988, the Contra War has caused 3,935 civilian deaths, 2,177 wounded and 6,345 kidnapped. The Contras did not normally take prisoners, and throughout the war practised a policy of kidnapping civilians. However, it is unclear as to whether kidnapping victims were executed, forced into military service and eventually demobilized or executed. Thus, the kidnapping figure suggests that many were killed, but the actual number is unknown. In addition, the civilian death estimate does not accurately reflect the likelihood that many more died as a result of the Nicaraguan conflicts. The absence of overall civilian death estimates thus implies that most combat death estimates did not clearly distinguish between civilian and combatant.

Recent Data Examined: Overestimates and Underestimates

Incompleteness of the Human Rights Estimates

With respect to the data in Tables 1 and 2, the first notable caveat is that there is missing information for several years. Of the types of deaths covered, the estimates for military-related deaths in El Salvador are clearly the most incomplete, with no data or partial estimates for 1982, 1984, 1990-91. Table 2 reveals that little reliable information is available on yearly estimates of civilian and military war-related deaths; therefore, only aggregate totals for both the Civil War and the Contra War are presented for Nicaragua. For El Salvador, as a result of the report of the Truth Commission, we have greater knowledge of proportionate responsibility for civilian deaths related to the conflict than in Nicaragua where no such comprehensive study has yet been performed.

El Salvador

The Government of El Salvador (GOES), the Fuerzas Armadas Salvadoreñas (FAS, Salvadoran Armed Forces) and the United States Department of State each presented estimates of Salvadoran Civil War deaths and other human rights violations throughout the course of the war that were substantially lower than estimates made by Salvadoran non-governmental human rights organizations such as Tutela Legal (TL), Socorro Jurídico (SJ, Legal Aid) and the Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (CDHES, Non-governmental Human Rights Commission), on which most international organization estimates were based. This divergence is particularly evident in 1981, where there was a considerable difference between the GOES and CDHES estimates of civilian deaths for the entire year: 5,328 and 17,303 respectively. Also, final estimates show a range that varies by over 37,000, with FAS as the most conservative with 37,907, the U.S. State Department offering a mid-range estimate of 55,000 and various human rights organizations settling on the upper figure of 75,000.

The reasons for this divergence, which seemed to emerge most dramatically in 1981, but which are ultimately reflected in the final estimates, are several. First, as Americas Watch observes in its 1983 report, "[v]iolence shifted significantly to the countryside [in late 1980-81], making it more difficult for human rights groups (with offices in the capital city) to secure reports or verify them."⁶ Major army offensives and civilian massacres in Morazán, Chalatenango and

TABLE 3
 Combat and Civilian Deaths in Major Wars of the Twentieth Century^a

Country	Years	Combat deaths	Civilian deaths	Wounded	Total deaths	Total casualties	Average population (mil.) ^b	Deaths/population ratio
El Salvador	(80-91)	33,000	55,000		88,000		4.89	1:56
Nicaragua	(75-90)	80,000 ^c		130,000	80,000	210,000	3.3	1:38
Guatemala	(66-87)				150,000 ^c		8.0	1:40
U.S. Civil War	(1861-65)	623,026		471,427	623,026	1,094,453	34.5	1:55
Mexican Rev.	(10-19)				1 mil.			1:10
World War I	(14-18)	8.5 mil.	6.5 mil.	21 mil.	15 mil.	36 mil.		1:12
Serbia		148,000	650,000		798,000			1:28
France								1:30
Germany								1:50
Austria-Hungary								1:57
Britain								1:79
Italy								1:107
Russia								1:2000
U.S.								
World War II	(39-45)	16.8 mil.	30-40 mil.	27 mil.	46.8-56.8 mil.	73.8-83.8 mil.		1:5
Poland								1:10
Yugoslavia					20 mil.			1:10
USSR								1:1.5
Holocaust			6 mil.			8.86 mil.		
Dresden			40-135,000					
Hiroshima			172,024			320,000		1:1.8

TABLE 3—Continued

Country	Years	Combat deaths	Civilian deaths	Wounded	Total deaths	Total casualties	Average population (mil.) ^b	Deaths/population ratio
Korean War	(50-52)	49,720			422,612	909,607	563	1:7
U.S. + U.N.		422,612 ^c			1,316,579	1,620,264	9.42	1:49
China		316,579 ^c	1 mil.		415,004		20.4	
N. Korea		70,000	345,004					
S. Korea								
Vietnam	(60-75)	58,000			3.6 mil.		40.8	1:11
U.S.		1.6 mil.	2 mil.		340,000 ^c		8.2	1:24
Vietnamese	(N+S)				400,000-1 mil. ^f		13.3	1:13-33
Angola	(75-91)				450-730,000	1-1.9 mil.	47	1:60-100
Mozambique	(76-92)				340,000	0.74-1.0 mil.	16.6	1:50
Iran	(80-90)				2 mil. ^c		4.9	1:2.5
Iraq	(80-90)				500,000-1 mil. ^c		7.6	1:7.5-15
Cambodia	(70-91)							
Rwanda	(94-)							

a. Sources include: M. Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992). See Tables 1 and 2 for El Salvador and Nicaragua data sources.

b. Population is taken as the average over the duration of the conflict. See B. R. Mitchell estimates in *International Historical Statistics: Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1992); *International Historical Statistics: Africa, Asia, Oceania* (New York: Stockton Press, 1995).

c. Aggregate estimate includes civilian deaths.

d. Country ratios equal total country deaths per average country population.

e. Combat death estimates for China and North Korea include up to 400,000 who died of disease.

f. Mozambique estimate includes up to 300,000 who died of starvation related to drought and famine.

San Vicente during 1980-82 highlighted instances of casualties that were not recognized by GOES and U.S. officials until the postwar negotiations. On the one hand, the non-governmental human rights group estimates, such as those of Tutela Legal and CDHES, were partly based on unverified reports, while on the other hand GOES and U.S. Embassy reports probably underestimated the actual number of deaths and tended to conflate civilian and combatant deaths.

Secondly, as Liisa North notes, estimates of war casualties corresponded with the legislative military aid appropriation cycles in the U.S., particularly in the early part of the war. Between 1981-83, in order to obtain Congressional approval for military aid, President Reagan, on four occasions, "certified" that the human rights situation was improving in El Salvador. Despite the fact that these certifications were contradicted by most independent human rights agencies, in 1983, the U.S. administration continued to report a decline in the number of "verified and reported" cases of killings during the previous six months.⁷

Perhaps the politicized nature of reporting of war-related casualties is most readily apparent in the estimates of combat deaths, which are the least reliable components of the data summarized for the Salvadoran conflict in Table 1. Although the data are incomplete, there are several examples of FMLN and FAS estimates of FMLN casualties that are different by a factor of 5 or more (see 1983 and 1989).⁸ The estimates of FAS combat deaths are mostly FAS sources because the FMLN normally reported only *bajas* or casualties, without identifying how many were killed. Both sides employed a consistent policy of reporting inflated estimates of their opponent's deaths, and minimizing their own, raising serious questions about the validity of the reports.

A similarly confusing pattern is notable in Clodfelter's summary of FAS and FMLN casualties during the war.⁹ For example, he reports 2,292 FAS combat deaths and 4,195 wounded between June 1982 and June 1983, at a time when FAS troop strength was approximately 33,000. The following year, as FAS troops strength grew to 54,000, the number dropped to 1,055 FAS combat deaths and 1,783 wounded. FMLN losses for 1983 were reported as 4,316, despite a troop strength of only 4,000-6,000, a highly questionable ratio. For 1985-89, Clodfelter reports FMLN to FAS combat death ratios often greater than 2:1, which is plausible but unlikely due to the 7:1 ratio of army to guerrilla combatants. Ironically, in Nicaragua despite a reversal in the ideological motivations of the conflict protagonists, the Sandinista army reported similar casualty ratios.¹⁰ Two considerations might support this

pattern. First, the FAS ability to treat their wounded was greatly superior to that of the FMLN, perhaps contributing to greater FMLN losses. Secondly, FMLN and FAS strategies shifted from large troop confrontations to smaller unit attacks in 1984, thus contributing to a downward trend in the overall number of deaths. However, it seems unlikely that a guerrilla force of between 5,000-10,000 combatants facing a 60,000 man army, would suffer twice the number of combat deaths.

It is clear that both FAS and FMLN distorted their respective casualty estimates in order to increase national and international support. The maximum and minimum cumulative estimates in Table 1, noting the problems addressed above, are thus problematic. A plausible estimate of 14,000 total FMLN combat deaths was provided by the 16th of January Foundation, an FMLN postwar non-governmental organization, roughly approximating the estimated total and noting that the several yearly estimates are missing. The total FAS combat deaths should presumably be higher than the FMLN count, but probably no higher than 20,000.¹¹ Thus a total combat death estimate of between 30,000-34,000 is most plausible.

Clearly, political motivations influenced the estimates of deaths on both sides. The FAS and the U.S. Embassy often referred to non-governmental human rights agencies as FMLN fronts, and governmental estimates were treated not only with equal suspicion by the U.S. but were subject to state repression. However, the FAS claim of only 5,287 total civilian deaths due to the war seems far too low, and calls into question the validity of the military components of its final estimate. While the State Department estimate of 55,000 total war-related deaths approximates the cumulative minimum number of war deaths derived from the yearly totals, it is well below the cumulative maximum. There is some remaining ambiguity stemming from a lack of clear distinctions between civilian and military related deaths. FAS and GOES estimates tended to view civilians who were killed in conflictive zones as combatants. Non-governmental human rights organization estimates used different criteria to distinguish civilians from combatants; however, their figures focused almost entirely on civilian deaths or relied on FMLN radio reports for FAS casualty estimates. In cases where combatant estimates were combined with civilian estimates, using two or more different sources, there is a possibility for some overlap due to this definitional problem (see yearly totals for 1982, 1983 and 1989 in Table 1).

The sum of these concerns raises the greatest reliability questions regarding the combat death estimates. The civilian death total of

50,000-60,000 seems to be most reliable. As noted above, the majority of these deaths have been attributed to FAS and GOES security forces.¹² Total civilian and military deaths attributed to the war can be safely estimated to be within the range of 80,000 and 94,000, omitting the lowest FAS total estimate of 37,907 based on highly questionable validity and the U.S. Embassy estimate of 55,000. The cumulative totals in Table 1 may underestimate the actual number of deaths due to the missing information regarding combatant deaths for several years. This estimate of military and civilian deaths due to war-related violence, while plausible, precludes a more concise estimate considering the caveats of the available data.

Nicaragua

Unlike El Salvador, there are few, if any, reliable estimates of yearly civilian and combatant war-related deaths—in either the Nicaraguan Civil War or the Contra War. In addition, the political motivations for organizations who reported human rights violations were reversed during the Contra War. The Comisión por la Protección y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CNPPDH, Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights) and the Comisión Permanente de los Derechos Humanos (CPDH, Permanent Human Rights Commission) are the two primary Nicaraguan human rights organizations responsible for investigating violations during the Contra War. The state-funded CNPPDH was more critical of Contra abuses, although it performed investigations of Nicaraguan security forces that led to the convictions of many Sandinista offenders. The CPDH is a quasi-independent organization that emerged during the late 1970s, but was more critical of the Sandinista government during the 1980s. CPDH reports were compromised by its publication of allegations unsubstantiated by subsequent investigations and by accepting donations from the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, whose efforts were sympathetic to the Contras.¹³ Both Nicaraguan agencies worked with international human rights organizations such as Americas Watch and Amnesty International in documenting violations of the rights of civilians during the Contra War. A third human rights agency, the Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (APDH, Association for Human Rights) was established in 1986 allegedly to investigate Contra violations. Largely funded by \$3 million in U.S. “humanitarian aid” to the Contras, APDH reports were found to be consistently unreliable.¹⁴

The data in Table 2 show a greater consensus on the total number of war-related deaths during the Contra insurgency of the 1980s than for the Sandinista-led insurrection. Clodfelter presents two different estimates for the Civil War, and confers greater reliability on the lower estimate of 10,000 deaths for the entire duration. This low figure seems unlikely due to other references to 20,000 losses during the September 1978 campaign and the final offensive from May-July 1979 alone. The U.S. State Department conservatively concludes that a figure of 50,000 is most likely.

For both conflicts there is general agreement that many of the war-related deaths were of civilian non-combatants. No formal aggregate estimates have verified a reliable proportion of civilians to combatants. However, two factors suggest that civilian war-related deaths were high during the Civil War. During this period, both armies were fairly small. The FSLN never counted more than 5,000 armed troops until late May 1979, compared with just 700 as of August 1978. The National Guard also only numbered approximately 13,000 at this time. Even though the FSLN had a relatively small fighting force, the National Guard made little attempt to distinguish between civilian and combatant, directing their energies into repression of civilians more than fighting the Sandinistas. Moreover, while the spontaneous uprisings, as in Monimbo in 1978, and the groundswell of popular support for the FSLN during the final offensive may have increasingly confused such distinctions, the government bombing of popular neighbourhoods and indiscriminate retaliation by the National Guard left little doubt among national and international observers that civilians experienced the lion's share of the casualties.

For the Contra War, the distinction between combatant and non-combatant becomes more complicated. Both the Sandinista army (EPS) and the Contra forces were considerably larger during the 1980s, reaching levels as high as 80,000 and 15,000 respectively.¹⁵ Fighting was limited largely to the countryside (Zelaya, Chontales, Boaca, Matagalpa, Jinotega and Nueva Segovia), unlike the urban battles of Sandinista insurrection (Managua, Matagalpa, León, Masaya, Chinandega, Estelí), thus making verification of human rights violations difficult. Claims of consistent Contra attacks against civilians were supported by extensive interviews with witnesses by Nicaraguan and international human rights organizations.¹⁶ Such organizations have also documented killing of civilians by EPS and Sandinista security forces.¹⁷ The U.S. State Department has selectively employed these

contesting accounts as part of a massive campaign to delegitimize the Sandinistas, often distorting available information beyond recognition for political ends.¹⁸ However, no summary reports which distinguish civilians from combatants, and which attempt to assign proportional responsibility to either the Contras or Sandinista security forces, have been issued. There is general agreement among international human rights organizations that there existed no government policy of extrajudicial execution or murder, while the Contras were found to demonstrate a consistent pattern of violating Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which governs protections due non-combatants during war.

In sum, we find general agreement on the total number of deaths due to the Contra War, approximately 30,000, with little confirmation on the distinction between civilians and combatants. The FSLN estimate of 61,826 seems an unlikely overestimate of actual casualties, perhaps inflated for political reasons. Similarly for the Civil War, if we rule out the low estimate of 10,000, there is a consensus around 50,000 war-related deaths, with no clear indication of how many of those were non-combatants. Thus an estimate for both conflicts combined of approximately 80,000 war-related deaths, with perhaps 40,000 of those being non-combatants seems plausible.

War Death Estimates: Some Tentative Conclusions

This summary does not include the most recent violence in El Salvador that has been estimated by ONUSAL, the United Nations Observer team, to have reached over 9,135 homicides in 1994.¹⁹ It is difficult to distinguish what proportion of these killings are politically motivated; however, there are considerable indications that reformed death squads are operating in a manner that may be comparable to the early war years. Similarly in Nicaragua, of the estimated 250,000 people bearing arms during the Contra War only 16,000 weapons were collected from the Contras in a dismal weapons buy-back program. Consequently the level of violence has remained high as a residue of 15 years of war in both countries. It is perhaps reasonable to consider these incidents of violence as war-related deaths.

The analysis presented above has summarized the available information on war-related deaths in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The resulting estimates are between 80,000 and 93,000 for El Salvador and approximately 80,000 for Nicaragua. There were similar patterns of politically motivated estimation of casualties in both conflicts, suggest-

ing that no conclusive figures will be forthcoming. Unfortunately reconstructing existing conditions of life as a baseline for estimating who died and where is complicated by the level of infrastructural destruction. It is worth noting that the FMLN strategy of destruction of rural municipal buildings and birth records in the conflictive zones makes the process of reconstructing first-hand information on who died in these areas almost impossible. It is, then, survivor accounts on which more accurate estimates depend.

Survey Research Estimates of the Casualties of War

The data we have presented thus far give us a fairly clear global picture of the magnitude of the human destruction in the Central American wars. But we do not know much else. We do not know who the victims were, where they lived, what were their ages, their social class, their political affiliations, their geographic distribution, etc. More generally, we do not know if the deaths affected all citizens of El Salvador and Nicaragua with equal ferocity, or if some groups were affected more than others. If we think of the data already presented in terms of an analogy to economics, what we have done is to provide the equivalent of the Gross National Product of Deaths for El Salvador and Nicaragua. But we have not provided the Gini coefficient of the Distribution of Deaths.

One very serious barrier to learning more about the distribution of deaths in these Central American wars is that we cannot interview the victims. We have access only to the survivors. Survivor reports are far from ideal. Memories become clouded over time, and grief and anger may lead to exaggerations. More serious is the problem of double counting since two relatives of the same victim can report his/her loss. Therefore, we would not want to rely upon interviews with survivors as a source of the death-count data, but such interviews can tell us more accurately than any other available source the characteristics of the survivors.

The Data

In this study we will utilize two national probability samples from Central America. The El Salvador sample was drawn in February 1995 and the Nicaragua sample in March 1995. In both cases the samples were designed to cover the entire national population, except in Nicaragua, in which the areas of the Atlantic Coast and the Río San Juan were

excluded. In Nicaragua the total sample size was 1,200, whereas in El Salvador the sample size was 1,609. In El Salvador, however, 200 of the 1,609 interviews represented oversamples in areas in which the FMLN won overwhelming victories in the 1994 elections at the local level. The motivation for this oversample was to be able to increase the sample size of those supporting the FMLN so that there would be a sufficient number of cases for meaningful statistical analysis. In order to have a sample that is representative of the population of El Salvador, those 200 additional cases need to be dropped, leaving a sample of 1,409. In some cases in our analysis below, however, we wish to examine FMLN supporters in particular and will concentrate on these additional 200 interviews. The sample designs for both studies were of area probability, relying upon the best available census and census-mapping information.

The Relevant Questionnaire Items

The surveys upon which we are basing our analysis were primarily designed to measure the political attitudes and behaviours of the populations of the two countries, and therefore the information on the consequences of the violence are limited. One relevant independent variable, however, was conceptualized as victimization in the wars. For that reason, three items were included, one to measure deaths of relatives, a second to measure internal refugees and the third to measure international refugees. The items themselves are as follows:²⁰

1. Have you lost some family member or close relative as a result of the armed conflict of the last decade? (include disappeared) 1. Yes, 2. No.
2. Has some member of your family had to flee or abandon his/her home because of the conflict of the last decade? 1. Yes, 2. No.
3. And has some family member had to leave the country? 1. Yes, 2. No.

Findings

Overall Results

We first report upon the overall results on the three items for the two countries. Table 4 contains the results.

This table contains a great deal of important information. First, we see that in both countries slightly over one third of the population have had family members who were killed during the violence. While this

seems like a very large proportion, the reader should be cautioned not to misinterpret the data to mean that one third of the people of El Salvador and Nicaragua were killed. Rather, one third of all of the people in these two countries had relatives who died during the conflict. Second, given the per capita data reported on in the first part of this article, it is surprising that the death rate in Nicaragua reported in the survey is not higher than El Salvador. If we accept the maximum death rate figures for both countries, and percapitize them by their present populations as calculated in the 1994 census of El Salvador and the 1995 census of Nicaragua, the death rate in El Salvador would be .018 percent, and in Nicaragua .036 percent, or almost double. Third, a somewhat higher percentage of the respondents in both countries had family members who were forced to abandon their homes and migrate to some other place in order to escape the hazards of the war. Finally, international migration produced by the war occurred at a somewhat lower level in both countries, but still affected the relatives of over one quarter of all of the people in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Estimates of migration suggest that somewhere between 648,871 and 1,403,642 Salvadorans became international refugees, or as many as over one quarter of the entire 1994 population left the country during the conflict. The survey figure of 27 percent seems on target. The official estimates for internal refugees is up to 577,182, or only 11.5 percent of the 1994 population compared with our survey figure of 36.3 percent. In Nicaragua, sources suggest as many as 613,700 people became international refugees, or 15 percent of the 1995 population compared with our figure of 29 percent, while as many as 350,000 Nicaraguans became internal refugees, or 9 percent of the population, compared with our survey figure of 29 percent. The lack of congruence between the two sources here may be a result of confusion over the internal versus international displacement.

TABLE 4
Survey Results of War Victims in El Salvador
and Nicaragua (as percentages)

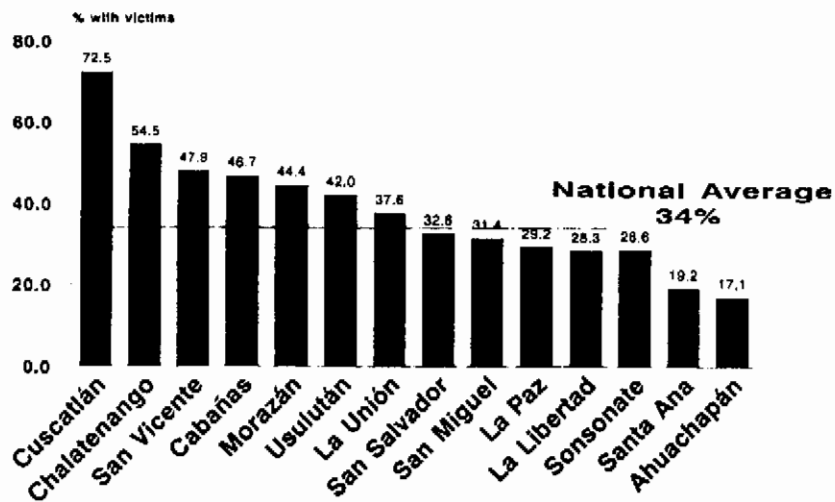
Respondents with family members who:	El Salvador	Nicaragua
Were killed	34.0	35.0
Became internal refugees	36.3	38.9
Became international refugees	27.2	29.0

Geographic Distribution of Victims

We now turn to the geographic distribution of the victims. Was it safer to live in the capital city or remote areas? Figures 1 and 2 show the departmental distribution for each country. Zelaya was excluded in the Nicaragua study. In El Salvador, the departmental average varies considerably, from a high of 72.5 percent in Cuscatlán to a low of 17.0 in Ahuachapán. The relatively low level of casualties in Santa Ana is certainly not unexpected, for this was a portion of the country that suffered very little damage in the war. Indeed, the entire western portion of the country, including the departments of Santa Ana, Sonsonate and La Libertad suffered little from the war, although one must hasten to add that these were the regions most affected during the *Matanza* of 1932.

FIGURE 1

Respondents with Family Member Killed during Conflict: El Salvador



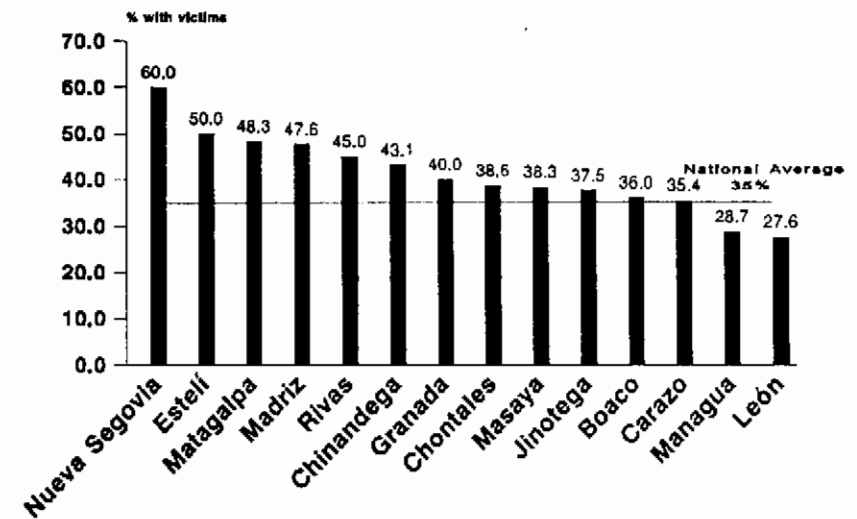
Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

The high death rate in Cuscatlán, however, might come as a surprise since so much of the reporting on the war concentrated on the combat in the border region with Honduras (Chalatenango, Cabañas and Morazán). It was there where the FMLN is reported to have had its strongest outposts and the army was the most aggressive in attacking the guerrillas, namely, the northern departments of Morazán and Chalatenango. In fact, Chalatenango ranks second, Cabañas fourth and

Morazán fifth, indicating a high level of casualties. But it is often forgotten that the longest and most persistent fighting took place no more than 40 kilometres from San Salvador on the skirts of the Volcán Guazapa, and in and around the town of Suchitoto. These areas are in Cuscatlán. Consequently, our survey seems to reflect with great accuracy the geographic impact of the war: the departments that we know to have been most highly affected show up in the survey as the departments with the largest number of family members having suffered losses. These results increase considerably our confidence in the survey as an accurate source for measuring the demographic impact of the wars of Central America.

FIGURE 2

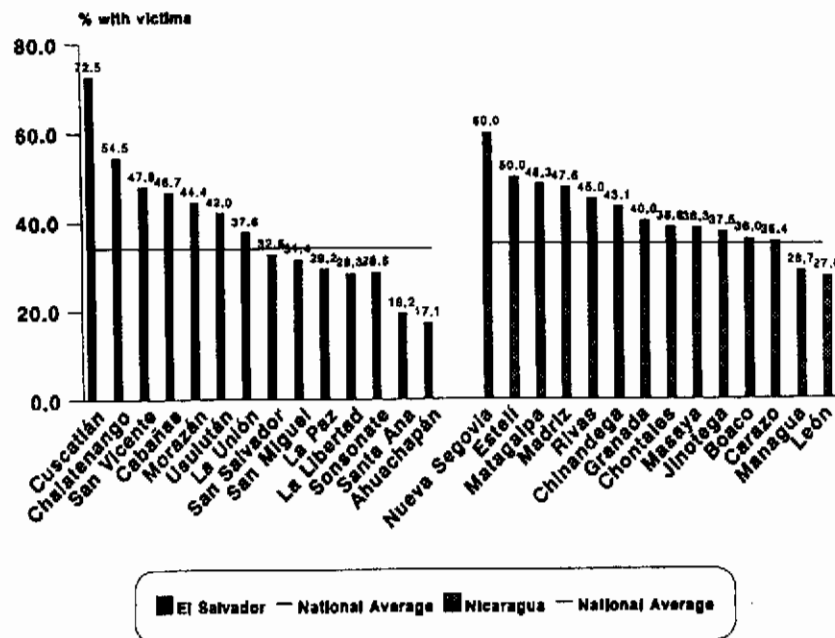
Respondents with Family Member Killed during Conflict: Nicaragua



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

In Nicaragua, as shown in Figure 2, we see a similar pattern, with important differences. The highest reported deaths occurred in Nueva Segovia, Estelí and Madriz, departments that were centres of the Contra War. Managua and León have the lowest death rates. It is easier to compare the pattern found in the two countries by examining Figure 3. Overall, the patterns are similar, but the extremes in El Salvador are greater; the department of highest violence is higher than in Nicaragua, and the department of lowest violence is lower.

FIGURE 3
Respondents with Family Members Killed during
Conflict: El Salvador and Nicaragua



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

Gender

In conventional warfare, soldiers are overwhelmingly male and represent the largest number of casualties. In the infamous Chaco war between Bolivia and Paraguay, it is said that a substantial portion of the male population of the country was wiped out. In Central America, the wars were not conventional, fought by guerrilla armies with many women soldiers and fought by government armies that killed many female civilians.

While the data cannot tell us about the gender of the victims, it can tell us about the gender of the survivors. As Table 5 shows, males and females were affected in nearly identical proportions in both countries, with males having a slight edge in both countries.

TABLE 5
Gender of the Survivors

	El Salvador		Nicaragua	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percentage with relatives killed	34.6	33.5	35.3	34.7

Socio-economic Status

Our central hypothesis regarding the socio-economic status of the victims is that they were poorer than the non-victims. Our survey provides us with indirect evidence of the socio-economic status of the victims. We make the plausible assumption that the socio-economic status of the victims, on average, does not differ dramatically from that of the survivors. For example, we would not expect that the average level of education of victims to differ significantly from the average of their survivors, except to the extent that survivors are likely to be older than the victims (it is the young who fight and die in wars) and the young, on average, are more educated than their parents.

Age

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the age of the victims from the age of the survivors. But we wish to know if those whose family members were killed in the wars were younger or older than those who did not have family members who were victims. The results shown in Table 6 show that there were in fact no significant differences among the two groups. In both countries, those with relatives killed were slightly older than those who did not have relatives who died in the war.

TABLE 6
Mean Age of the Survivors

	El Salvador	Nicaragua
Relatives killed	38.1	35.9
Relatives not killed	37.1	34.8

Education

In Table 7, we present the first clear evidence supporting the hypothesis that the victims were poorer than those who survived. The mean educa-

tion level of the families of those killed in both El Salvador and Nicaragua is lower than for those who did not lose anyone during the war. In the case of El Salvador, the difference is statistically significant.

TABLE 7

Mean Years of Education of the Survivors

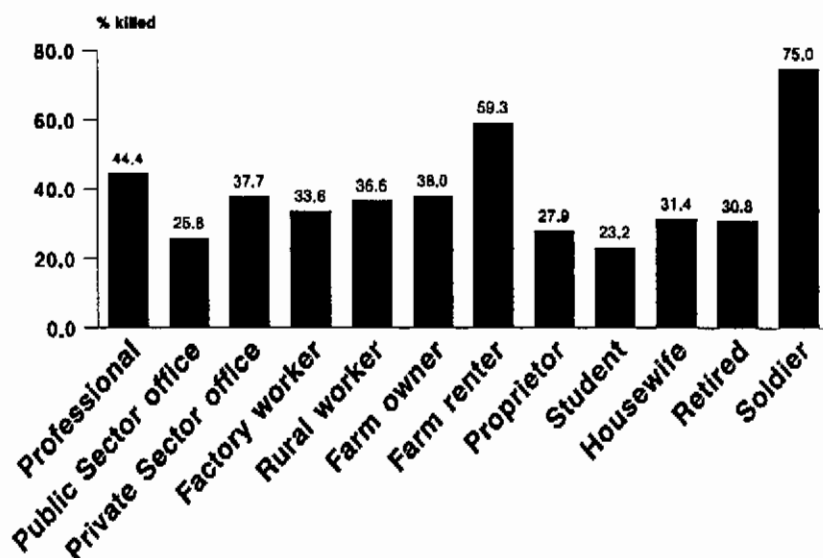
	El Salvador	Nicaragua
Relatives killed	5.4*	5.7
Relatives not killed	6.2	6.3

* $p < .01$

Occupation

FIGURE 4

Member of Family Killed in War, by Occupation: El Salvador



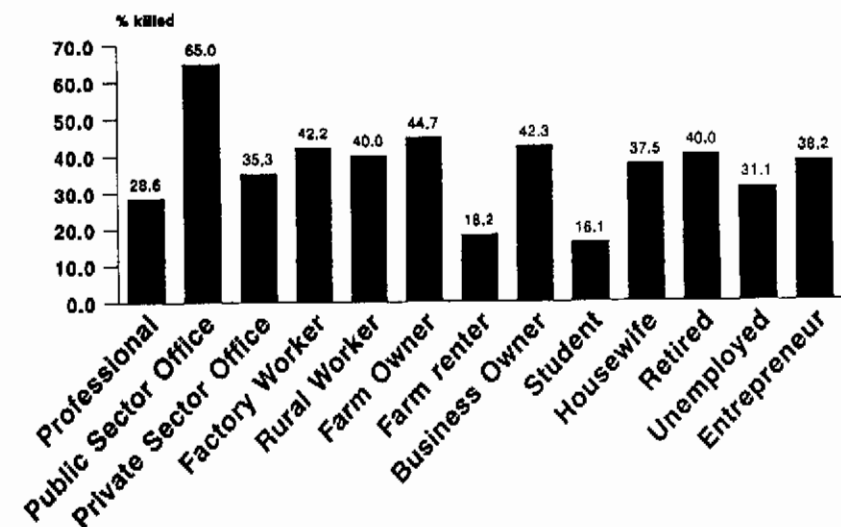
Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

But education alone does not tell us all we need to know about the families of those who were killed. A clearer indication is by examining the occupations of the survivors. Figure 4 shows the distribution of occupations in the survey and the relative impact of the war on each. It is not surprising that the soldiers in the sample were the most heavily affected by the war. Far more interesting are the remaining occupa-

tions. We see that those who worked in the public sector in clerical jobs experienced a relatively low level of loss. Even more surprising, perhaps, is the low level of loss among students since it was thought that students were especially likely to be victims in the war. However, it must be remembered, we are dealing with the families of those killed, and students in the present sample were likely to have been fairly young during the war years. In contrast, the two most highly affected groups are professionals and landless peasants who rent or sharecrop land. In many ways, this finding reveals much about the war; it affected El Salvador's poorest citizens, as well as its best off. Indeed, it affected the social extremes more than it did the centre.

FIGURE 5

Member of Family Killed in War, by Occupation: Nicaragua



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

Figure 5 shows for Nicaragua the relationship between occupation and loss of a family member. It is surprising to see how different this result is from that in El Salvador. In Nicaragua the most seriously affected group was public-sector office workers, whereas in El Salvador this was the least affected group. A similar contrast appears among the renter/sharecropper population, which in El Salvador was highly affected, but in Nicaragua was among the least affected. It should be noted that in Nicaragua we did not include a code for soldier, and therefore did not have any information on the impact of the war on this

group. It is possible that some of those who identified themselves as public-sector office workers were, in reality, soldiers and, therefore, the deaths in this category were exaggerated.

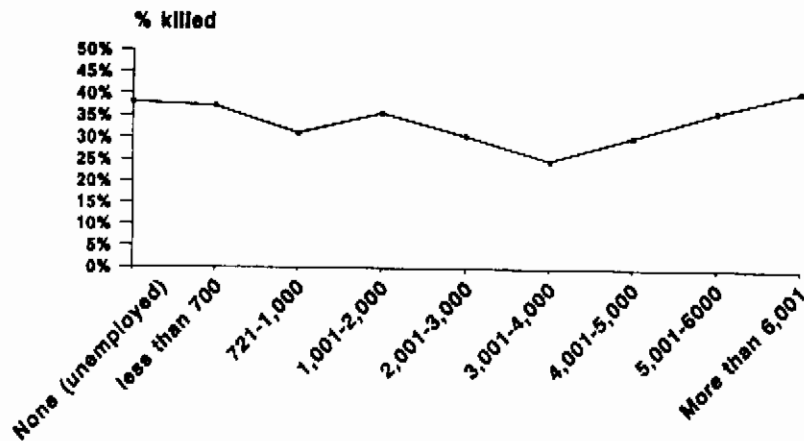
These sharp contrasts between El Salvador and Nicaragua help suggest the fundamentally different nature of the two conflicts. In Nicaragua the deaths were spread across the board, especially if we assume that many of the deaths attributed to the public-sector employees were actually military deaths. In El Salvador, however, the war affected those at the extremes, farmland renters on the one hand and professionals on the other. We will see these differences more clearly when we examine the ideology of the population.

Income

We also have information on the income of the respondents. In Figures 6 and 7 the relationship between war casualties and income is displayed. As can be seen, no overall pattern emerges for either country.

FIGURE 6

Family Member Killed in War, by Income: El Salvador



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

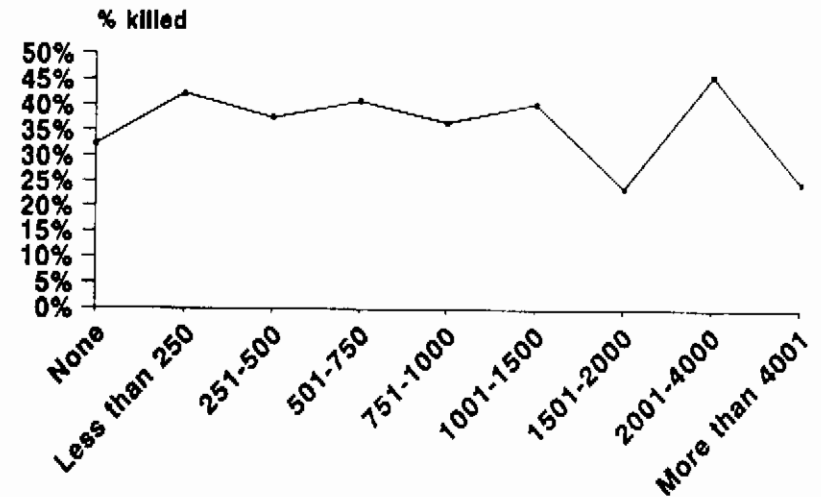
Ideology and the Families of the Victims

The above analysis demonstrated few major differences among the families of the victims of the violence in both El Salvador and Nicaragua other than the lower level of education among the victims in comparison with the non-victims. The conclusion that one can draw from

this analysis is that the effects of the war were widespread, cutting across class and socio-economic lines. These results make it appear as if there are no real differences between the impact of the war in the two countries, but, as the following analysis reveals, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, what we have discovered is that political ideology, far more than the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of individuals, explains the impact of the war on life and death.

FIGURE 7

Family Member Killed in War, by Income: Nicaragua

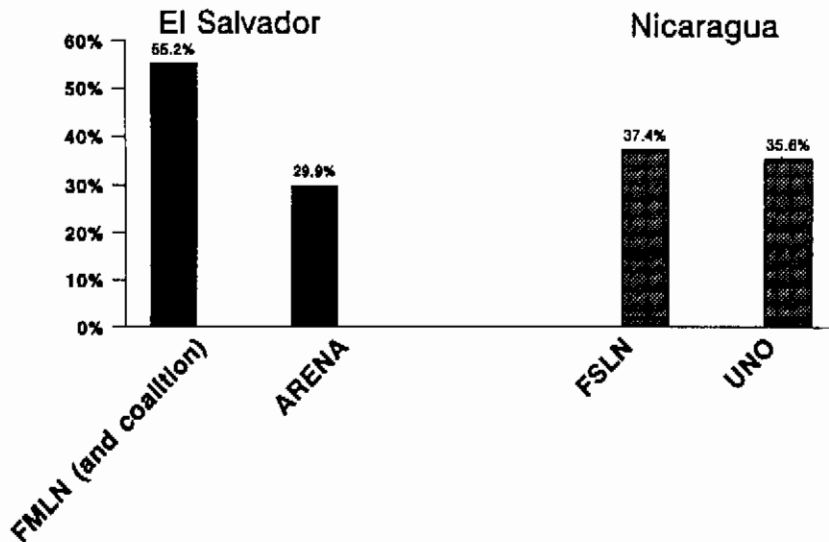


Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

We first looked at political party affiliation of the survivors to try to determine something about the political preferences of those killed. We know from a great deal of voting behaviour research, that party loyalties tend to run in families. While it is abundantly clear that not all children take on the party of their parents, it is also clear that it is far more common to find children of the same party as their parents than it is to find children of different parties. Similarly, party preference tends to include the extended family as well. Important exceptions are well known, such as the Chamorro family in Nicaragua, but those are merely visible exceptions to the general rule. We feel confident, therefore, in using the party affiliation and ideological preferences of the survivors as a reasonable measure of the affiliation and preferences of those who were killed.

Figure 8 compares the impact of war losses by party affiliation of those who survived. We focus only upon the major party groupings of left and right in the two countries. It is clear from Figure 8 that there is a strikingly different pattern in the two countries. In El Salvador, those associated with the left, i.e., the FMLN, suffered war casualties at a rate far higher (sig. < .001) than those on the right, i.e., ARENA. In Nicaragua, however, while the left (FSLN) also suffered higher casualties than those on the right (UNO), the differences are small and statistically insignificant.

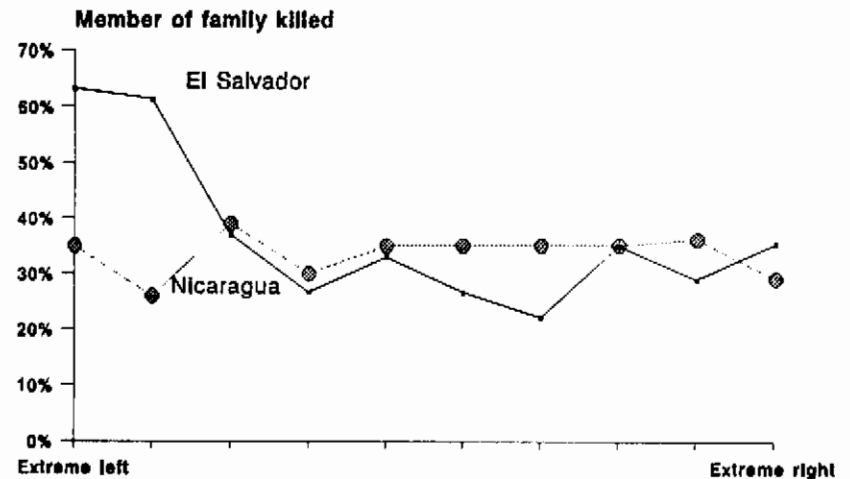
FIGURE 8
Family Member Killed in War, by Party: El Salvador and Nicaragua



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

Further evidence of the differential impact of ideology on war deaths is revealed in Figure 9, which uses a left-right scale. Each individual who responded to the survey was asked to locate themselves on a continuum from left to right that had 10 points on it. As can be seen in the figure, ideology had a strong impact in El Salvador and almost none in Nicaragua. In El Salvador the extreme left suffered a far higher proportion of casualties than those in the centre or right, although there is a slight increase among those on the extreme right. In Nicaragua, no such pattern is uncovered, and indeed there is a slight decline among those on the extreme right.

FIGURE 9
Family Member Killed in War, by Ideology: El Salvador and Nicaragua



Source: University of Pittsburgh Central American Public Opinion Project.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is clear from the evidence presented that the two cases under study are very different. In both cases, the violence cut across all socio-economic sectors, but in El Salvador it largely affected those with leftist ideological sentiments. In Nicaragua, however, there were really two wars. The first was the war against Somoza, one in which nearly all sectors of Nicaraguan society participated, although the left was more heavily engaged than the right. The second was the Contra War, the war to unseat the Sandinistas, in which the right fought against the left. Therefore, in Nicaragua, all sectors suffered, whereas in El Salvador, one sector suffered far more than any other.

We can speculate about the impact of this differential suffering on the reconciliation process underway in each country since the wars came to an end. El Salvador has been far more successful than Nicaragua putting the war behind it and reconstructing a new more peaceful society. Nicaraguans, on the other hand, have been thus far unable to agree on the basic structure of the postwar society. Perhaps because the war cut such a wide ideological swath in Nicaragua, there is less willingness to compromise, whereas in El Salvador the left suffered disproportionately and therefore might be more willing to compromise to save themselves from further suffering.

We should also comment upon our methodology. We have combined the estimate of war deaths from various sources with two surveys of the survivors of the conflicts. In doing so we have uncovered important evidence supporting the view that the war in El Salvador was one directed largely against the left. The survey research instrument, not often used by demographers to obtain information of this sort, has proven to be surprisingly useful.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented to the Seminario Internacional sobre la Población del Istmo Centroamericano (International Seminar on Central American Population), 10-21 October 1995.
2. For the purposes of this article, the Nicaraguan Civil War and the subsequent Contra War will be referred to as a single conflict, although the political nature of each war had different implications for the reporting of war-related deaths.
3. For a similar summary of this issue in Argentina's "Dirty War," see Alison Brisk, "The Politics of Measurement: The Contested Count of the Disappeared in Argentina," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16 (1994): 676-692, and Thomas B. Jabine and Richard P. Claude, eds., *Human Rights and Statistics: Getting the Record Straight* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).
4. The estimate of 75,000 has been cited by the United Nations-Salvadoran Truth Commission Report, *From Madness to Hope*, published in 1992. Population is taken as an average over the course of the war.
5. See Table 4, note a for sources. Population estimates are taken from B. R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics: Africa, Asia, Oceania* (New York: Stockton Press, 1992); see also note b, Table 3.
6. Americas Watch, *Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: AW, 1983), p. 9.
7. Liisa North, *Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador* (Westport, CT: Lawrence-Hill, 1985), p. 108.
8. Year-to-year information on combat deaths is incomplete and based on inconsistent sources.
9. See note 7, Table 1.
10. See note 5, Table 2.
11. See note 14, Table 1, for estimating FAS deaths from FMLN reports of *bajas* (casualties).
12. Despite certain violations by the FMLN, the Truth Commission estimated that over 90 percent of the civilian deaths were carried out by the Armed Forces, GOES security forces or right-wing death squads.
13. In 1986, CPDH accepted \$50,000 from the NED for report duplication in the United States. *Envío* editorials have criticized CPDH for soft criticism of the Contras in their reporting of human rights abuses. One noted example is CPDH's reporting of only 15 Contra kidnapping cases out of an estimated 912 during 1987. See Paul Laverty, *Human Rights Report—The CPDH: Can It Be Trusted?* (Glasgow: Scottish Medical Aid for Nicaragua, 1986).

14. Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Right to Survive: Human Rights in Nicaragua* (London: CIIR, 1987), pp. 39-40.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 179. There is some doubt that Contra forces ever actually reached above 10,000 regulars. The Contras formally demobilized 19,613 combatants in July 1990, although only 16,000 weapons were turned in. The FSLN estimates that only 50 percent of the demobilized forces were actually combatants (*Envío*, July 1990, p. 40).
16. The CNPPDH (*Boletín*, December 1985) gives 1,062 investigated and confirmed killings of civilians by contra forces for the period 1980 to 30 June 1985 (see CIIR, *Right to Survive*, p. 53). Many of the Contra victims were social service workers (teachers, health-care workers, co-op administrators), as part of the Contra strategy to neutralize the government's social programs in remote regions. Investigation of Contra abuses was also obstructed by kidnapping of human rights workers.
17. The most notable incidents include the EPS killing of between 14 and 17 Miskito civilians in Zelaya in December 1981 and the similar killing of 69 Miskito civilians in Puerta Cabezas in 1982. See Americas Watch, *On Human Rights in Nicaragua* (New York: AW, 1982), pp. 64-65, and Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, *Nicaragua Revolutionary Justice* (New York: LCIHR, 1985), p. 140. Former DGSE official Alvaro Baldizón claims that the Sandinista Interior Ministry Forces (DGSE), under direction of Minister Tomás Borge, directed the murder of some 2,000 people. Americas Watch has challenged this claim, and reports that the number of recorded killings outside combat and disappearances for which the Nicaraguan government is responsible is closer to 300 between 1980-86. These incidents were committed by DGSE or army agents in remote areas of Matagalpa and Jinotega, and in some cases involved torture. Many Sandinista violators have been convicted of these offenses and imprisoned. See Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Nicaragua 1985-86* (New York: AW, 1986), pp. 127-149, and *Nicaragua: A Human Rights Chronology July 1979-July 1989* (New York: AW, 1989), p. 13. Other noted Sandinista abuses involved forced relocation of Miskito and Sumu communities in 1981-83, forced recruitment, lack of due process for certain incarcerated Contra prisoners and the suspension of civil liberties under the declared state of emergency.
18. For instance, in a 9 May 1984 speech, Reagan declared that "there has been an attempt to wipe out an entire culture, the Miskito Indians, thousands of whom have been slaughtered or herded into detention camps where they have been starved and abused" (cited in Holly Sklar, *Washington's War on Nicaragua* [Boston: South End Press, 1989], p. 105). This seems to lack credibility, given that conditions at the camps had improved considerably that year, certain EPS violators had been prosecuted, and later in 1984 resettlement in the Río Coco region was permitted.
19. *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 March 1995. Report by the Salvadoran Attorney General on the level of violence. In addition to homicides, there were 6,443 victims wounded in attacks, and 3,600 reported death threats.
20. In Nicaragua, the first item was altered in form somewhat. It read: "Diga Ud. Si durante el conflicto armado de la última década: ¿Algún miembro de su familia fue asesinado por esa causa? (incluir desaparecidos)." The main difference in the two versions is that in El Salvador, in addition to *familia* (family), the item included reference to *pariente cercano* (close family relative). We assume that the term *familia* includes both categories, but it may have been responsible for higher reporting in El Salvador than in Nicaragua.