

Uncertainty in Guatemala

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By María Josefina Arce

A little more than a week has passed since the general elections were held in Guatemala, and the panorama is tense and uncertain in the Central American nation, where civil society organizations denounced that the results of the first round of elections are in danger, after the controversial ruling of the Constitutional Court, supported by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

Last Saturday, the highest judicial instance of the country decided to temporarily suspend the qualification of the results of the June 25 elections, due to alleged irregularities denounced by right-wing parties.

Nine organizations filed an injunction before the Court to prevent the Supreme Electoral Tribunal from making official the victory of the two most voted candidates among the more than 20 aspirants, who will have to face each other in a second round on August 20 for the presidency of the country.

Hours later, in a resolution, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal stated that it complied with the ruling and ordered to stop the officialization of the results of the first round.

With 15.8% of the votes, Sandra Torres, of Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza, and 11.7% Bernardo

Arévalo, of the social democrat Movement Semilla, were the winners of the day, in which the null vote accounted for more than 17%.

The great surprise was Arevalo, who did not appear as a favorite in the opinion polls, and who slipped into the ballot, after achieving a great support in urban areas.

In fact, the presidential candidate for Semilla presented before the Constitutional Court three petitions seeking to contain the effects of the measures taken. We are acting in defense of the vote, within the framework of the existing legislation, despite the fact that it is being violated, he said.

By coincidence, analysts point out that the questions of alleged fraud began after the announcement of Arevalo's passage to the second round, whose convocation is also paralyzed.

The decision of the highest judicial instance of the country, supported by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, has awakened the criticism of diverse sectors and of international organizations observing the June 25 elections.

Mirador Electoral, which groups several civil society organizations, affirmed that the legal actions filed by different political parties seek to create the conditions for an electoral coup, which, it pointed out, is equivalent to a coup d'état.

In a communiqué, he denounced that the parties that were disadvantaged in the elections intend to annul them and called upon the citizens to remain alert.

The elections had already arrived with a rarefied atmosphere and a great distrust of the electorate, after complaints of irregularities such as differentiated criteria to accept or deny candidacies.

That is the case of the candidate for the leftist Movement for the Liberation of the Peoples, the indigenous leader Thelma Cabrera, whose registration was denied by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, while it accepted that of Zury Ríos, of the right-wing Valor Party and daughter of the former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt, although the Constitution prohibits that possibility to relatives of coup perpetrators.

Uncertainty dominates today the panorama in Guatemala, where denunciations of attempts to prevent a second round of the general elections continue.

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