

Guatemala Yet to Decide over New President in Run-off



After months of protests leading to the resignation of Guatemala's former president Otto Pérez Molina, Guatemalans headed to the ballot box to elect their next leader. There are 7.5 million registered voters in Guatemala, and according to the Organization of American States' observation mission the elections were a success, with 71 percent of eligible voters participating.

But with no clear victor winning the majority of the vote, three candidates will most likely be squaring off in the next round. So let's just start to unravel who these candidates are?

Jimmy Morales most of the votes but not enough to avoid a runoff. In the American press, he's portrayed as a TV comedian that came from a poor background, became a small business owner, and pulled himself up by his bootstraps.

What interests does Jimmy Morales represent, and which voting bloc supported him in this election?

Jimmy Morales works on TV. He's a comedian. But he's surrounded by a military elite that has a lot of people that were part of the genocide and the war crimes in the early '80s. All of them have reunited to take care of old legal demands against military commandos, and all of them are related in some way to the war crimes.

In the early '70s these guys funded the party called the MLN, which was the political party of organized violence. The same political party who hosted then president of Guatemala, Maldonado Aguirre. So we can see those networks moving and reorganizing themselves to keep themselves in power, and especially to protect themselves against trials for the human rights violations during the war.

Manuel Baldizón, as well as First Lady Sandra Torres, had slightly over 19 percent of the vote. Now, these two candidates most likely are going to be going against Morales. What interests do they represent and how do they differ from Morales?

Manuel Baldizón is part of organized crime in Guatemala. A lot of people have denounced him as being part of criminal structures connected with drug cartels and also paramilitary forces. Baldizón is also part of a lot of small businesses that are connected to bus travel agencies, and also to new economic powers. So he's not representing the traditional economical elite.

Sandra Torres belongs to the traditional economic elite. So the power on the right in Guatemala, the elites, are reorganizing themselves to be part of the government, and that's what we are seeing. There's no opposition force. There's no revolutionary movement.

It sounds like there isn't much of a difference between these candidates. They represent the interests of the elites, but it seems that people are sick of the status quo. Did voters not have any strong challengers outside of this political elite in this round of elections?

No. That's one of the saddest parts in all of this. The protests were demanding not just a resignation of Otto Pérez Molina and Roxana Baldetti. A lot of the protesters were asking for some political reforms in some of the most important laws in Guatemala that can change the way that elections are held. But that didn't happen.

And what was the role of the United States in all of this? Is the United States favoring one candidate over another?

They favor two candidates over another. They are favoring Jimmy Morales and Sandra Torres over Manuel Baldizón, because Baldizón has been saying that he's against all of the pressure that the U.S. embassy has put in all the institutions that have anything to do with the elections. Also because the US is fighting the popular demand to delay the elections to November or December to build a citizen movement, a popular movement that can become a political force and represent popular demands in the new government.

The US intervened in the institutional commission for the elections, and gave money to a lot of NGOs to campaign in the media and convince people that that it was necessary to hold the elections and not talk about changing the electoral law and cleaning out the political system.

Behind the popular demands for the resignation of Otto Pérez Molina and also the suspension of the election, are the historical demands of the indigenous communities, the women's struggle, saying that they don't want to have more transnational companies evicting indigenous communities, arranging the laws the way they want, to win trials against communities and implement mining companies and hydroelectric projects that ride roughshod over the natural environment.

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