

The only purpose of “elections” in Guatemala

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The only purpose of “elections” in Guatemala - a country ruled exploitatively, violently and corruptly by the ‘Covenant of the Corrupt’ elites - is to allow the U.S., Canada and European Community, the World Bank, IMF, Inter-American development Bank and transnational corporations to state publicly that they maintain economic, military and political relations with the “democratic government” of Guatemala.

- Below: Guatemalan 2023 elections update, El Faro News English

This U.S.-led “international community” is significantly responsible for the lack of democracy in Guatemala, empowering, enriching and propping up the ‘Covenant of the Corrupt’ regime that has ruled the country almost continually since the U.S.-orchestrated military coup in 1954 ousted Guatemala’s last actual democratic government.

This is the global political and economic order working as designed, in 2023.

The final stretch in Guatemala: Suspicions of cooptation of electoral arbiters and a narco-cloud over the June 25 elections

By Roman Gressier, June 1, 2023, El Faro English

<https://mailchi.mp/elfaro.net/pineda-elections-guatemala-6216340?e=2943d15c91>

Less than a month before the Guatemalan presidential elections, it’s unclear how many contenders will be allowed to compete in the race, as it devolves into a judicial brawl.

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) set Monday, May 29 as the deadline to include names on the ballot. “After then, it will no longer be in our hands, but rather the printing companies,” asserted Chief Magistrate Irma Palencia.

On May 19, a court suspended candidate Carlos Pineda, a businessman who rode a TikTok-first strategy out of obscurity to first place in early May polling, casting himself as an unscripted by-the-bootstraps entrepreneur.

He had called for an aggressive application of the death penalty, criticized the privatization of highway tolls and electricity, and called Nayib Bukele a good dictator, worthy of emulation — including unconstitutional reelection, “if the people ask me to.”

Pineda had displaced conservative headliner Zury Ríos in the polls to fourth and former first lady-turned-political boss Sandra Torres to second. He was then ousted within two weeks for alleged technicalities in the nomination from his party Citizen Prosperity.

He is the third presidential candidate excluded this year, each showing different hues of anti-system rhetoric. Each of the three —Pineda, Indigenous national leader Thelma Cabrera, and elite mutineer Roberto Arzú— have denounced “electoral fraud” and called on supporters to cast empty “null” ballots in the presidential race.



Guatemalan presidential candidate Thelma Cabrera of the MLP (Movement for the liberation of peoples party), left, who was illegally ousted from running for the presidency this year. @ Plaza Publica

CID Gallup found that Pineda's fall boosted Torres to first place and Ríos to third behind Edmond Mulet, an ex-U.N. diplomat dogged by an arrest in 1981 for allegedly trafficking illegal adoptions during the armed conflict.

"It turns out that polls do more to block candidates than to influence voters," quipped political scientist Marielos Chang.

From a field of over 20 candidates, only two will meet in the August 20 run-off. Mulet is facing efforts from the Public Prosecutor's Office to expel him, too, for criticizing lawfare against journalists. That perhaps explains why he declared last week, "CICIG never again" — a wink to the shadow actors controlling the judicial system who pushed for and celebrated the expulsion of the U.N. anticorruption commission in 2019.

"The unconstitutional exclusion of candidates not only tramples the rights of the excluded to be elected, but even more gravely, it thwarts electors' right to choose," said former attorney general and ambassador Acisclo Valladares Molina.

He later added: “I’m terribly sorry for the remaining candidates... Any triumph will have the taste of illegitimacy.”

“From the start of the process we denounced an intention to leave out those who [the high courts and TSE] considered could shift the scenario, to favor traditional elites and criminals,” said Sandra Xinico Batz, anthropologist and member of the Movement for the Liberation of Peoples (MLP), one of the excluded parties.

“As a Kaqchikel woman I don’t believe only in reforms to the colonial state,” she told El Faro English. “If there is not a true social transformation, the situation won’t change. And that, unfortunately, requires a provocation.”

Narco-trafficking shadow

Pineda’s precipitous rise and fall severely rattled an already fragile electoral field. The press has at times portrayed him as an outsider, or anti-corruption candidate, but his transportation business in a trafficking corridor, U.S. visa revocation, and choice of party have fueled suspicions of a drug connection.

Pineda dismisses as smears multiple press reports that he tried to run for VP in 2019 on the ticket of UCN party candidate Mario Estrada, who is currently in U.S. prison on a drug trafficking conviction.

When the UCN —emblematic of drug traffickers’ reach in Congress because of its connections to the Huista cartel — was dissolved this year, its legislators were absorbed into Citizen Prosperity, the party that Pineda joined this year, and into Vamos, the party of current President Giammattei.

Former Minister of Governance Carlos Menocal asserts that whereas drug traffickers a decade and a half ago had more circumstantial political ties, narcos now have open footholds in the parties of Giammattei, Torres, Ríos, and Pineda, among others, and are running as candidates particularly at the municipal level. “For these alliances in this system of trafficking, [Pineda] as a candidate has been an uncomfortable neighbor,” said Menocal.

Not all of his opponents have faced similar legal scrutiny. Torres was freed last November from charges of unreported campaign donations from her 2015 bid.

Ríos' running mate was cleared just three days before their campaign launch of accusations of siphoning Guatemala City municipal funds from 2011 to 2015 for political campaigning.

Poqomam Mayan leader Juan Carlos Jerónimo recently interpreted: "The Supreme Electoral Tribunal has been co-opted by those imposing their own benefit."

Fears include the possibility that authorities could suspend the elections. "There is at least an assurance that the elections will occur, even with Guatemalan system's vicissitudes and defects, but there isn't a 100 percent guarantee," said Menocal.

In the scenario of a vote, observation missions like the OAS, which first visited Guatemala on May 5, are in a bind as to whether to certify the results given that local civil society groups and the overseas diplomatic corp are already indicating a contamination of the process and the courts.

The conservative International Republican Institute wrote in a May 22 report: "Most concerningly, the government has used its excessive power over judicial processes to influence decisions and block certain candidates."

"These actions have contributed to growing skepticism within the international community regarding the independence of the [TSE]," they continued, "rais[ing] questions regarding whether the election process is free and fair."

Ironically, the tone of the Biden administration, purportedly tough on corruption and insistent on "democracy versus autocracy" in its foreign policy, has in the past week struck an opposite chord.

On May 26, amid the trial of Guatemalan publisher José Rubén Zamora and electoral onslaught, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris spoke with Giammattei on the phone and Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya traveled to Guatemala to meet with public officials, civil society groups, and journalists.

The United States and a good part of the international community have expressed in private that their priority is for an election to be held.

But Harris dedicated most of the call to curbing migration and fostering foreign investment, relegating explicit mention of the elections to the last line of her readout.

Zeya was similarly fixated on the end of Title 42. Near the end of her statement, she framed “freedom of the press, judicial independence, and transparent electoral processes [as] key to attracting investment and promoting inclusive economic growth.”

The day after her visit, another anti-corruption prosecutor was detained in Guatemala by the office of the U.S.-sanctioned Attorney General.

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