

Rights Action
August 21, 2023

Guatemala Election Watch #20
President Arevalo & Semilla Party win Guatemalan elections
Urgent questions for US, Canada & international community

Dear Rights Action friends and support:

Thank-you for years of trust and support for our work in Guatemala and Honduras, and our work to try and hold accountable and transform the policies and actions of the 'global north' – specifically the US and Canada. "Victories" in these by-definition long-term struggles are very hard to come by. This is an extraordinary achievement of the Guatemalan people, that should be fully celebrated, even as the anti-democratic, exploitative, corrupt and repressive forces –from inside and outside the country– are assuredly already scheming how they will try to 'contain' and limit in every way possible the efforts of the new government to bring about serious reforms and change.

So it goes.

Thank-you

Grahame Russell

Guatemalans Voted to End 69 Years of Corrupt Rule. Will US, Canada Accept It?
To understand Guatemala's challenges going forward, we must ask questions about the role of the international community.

By [Grahame Russell](#), [TRUTHOUT](#), August 25, 2023

<https://truthout.org/articles/guatemalans-voted-to-end-69-years-of-corrupt-rule-will-us-canada-accept-it/>



Guatemalan presidential candidate for the Semilla party, Bernardo Arévalo, delivers a speech during the closing of his campaign at Central Square in Guatemala City on August 16, 2023. LUIS ACOSTA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

On August 20, 2023, the Semilla Party's Bernardo Arévalo and Karin Herrera [were elected](#) president and vice president of Guatemala.

This election will bring a formal end to 69 years of anti-democratic, military-backed, corrupt, "open-for-global-business" governments when the transition of power takes place on January 14, 2024. "The Supreme Electoral Tribunal has recognized the results and what the people have shouted is, 'No more corruption,'" President-elect [Arévalo said](#) in an August 20 press conference.

But Arévalo's election won't bring an end to the interests of an alliance of corrupt judges, prosecutors, politicians, and economic and military elites known as the "[Covenant of the Corrupt](#)," who have run the country for decades.

These elites, who now have to vacate the executive branch of government for at least four years, retain considerable control over most branches of the state and

most institutions of the government. They dominate all sectors of Guatemala's exploitative economy.

As millions of long dispossessed, impoverished Guatemalans, a majority being Indigenous Mayan peoples, celebrate the Semilla Party's victory, seemingly impossible-to-overcome challenges still remain within its borders — challenges the incoming government will have to address and work to remedy.

But before it can get to work remedying the country's systemic inequalities, the party will have to overcome ongoing "lawfare" attacks against its members, who face potential arrest on trumped-up charges. By legally attacking the Semilla Party, the Covenant of the Corrupt, which controls the attorney general's office, hopes to render the Semilla Party itself illegal, leaving Arévalo and Herrera as an independent president and vice president.

Such attacks are also targeting [the role of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal](#) in officializing the final vote count.

Guatemala faces just as many challenges from outside its borders, namely the policies and actions of the United States-led "international community," including Canada, the European Union, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and countless transnational companies operating in partnership with Covenant of Corrupt elites in the sectors of for-export food production, mining, tourism, hydroelectric dams and maquiladora sweatshop garment production.

To understand these challenges, we must ask important questions about the role and responsibility of the U.S. and international community over the past 69 years of maintaining beneficial political and economic relations with successive military-backed, Covenant of Corrupt governments.

"Bitter Fruit": U.S. Military Coup

What would Guatemala be like today as a government and people if the U.S. had not planned and orchestrated a military coup in 1954?

The June 27, 1954, ["bitter fruit" coup](#) violently ended Guatemala's only period of actual democracy, from 1944-1954, crushing 10 years of social, economic, land

and human rights reforms that the governments of President Juan Jose Arévalo (father of President-elect Bernardo Arévalo) and President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman were working to implement.

The coup restored to power the traditional military-backed economic and political elites who had been in power from 1931-1944, during the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Gen. Jorge Ubico — precursors to Guatemala's Covenant of Corrupt governments of today.

After refusing to establish diplomatic relations with the democratically elected governments in power from 1944-1954, Canada effectively legitimized the 1954 coup by establishing diplomatic relations with the military-backed government in 1961.

Soon after, the Canadian government [openly supported](#) the arrival of the world's biggest nickel mining company at the time, the International Nickel Company, known as INCO, to take control of a vast swath of Mayan Q'eqchi' territories and begin long history of violent, harmful and corrupt mining that continue today.

“Scorched Earth” Genocide

What would Guatemala be like today if the U.S. had not — in the name of “fighting communism” — backed the Guatemalan military and death squads during the state repression and terrorism of the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s?

Hundreds of thousands of mainly Indigenous Mayan people — young and old, men and women — were [savagely massacred, tortured and “disappeared”](#) in “scorched earth” military campaigns in the highlands.

In [four regions of the country](#), genocides were carried out against the local Mayan populations. Millions of people were violently displaced from their homes and lands during the military campaigns, becoming desperately poor and internally displaced, or refugees seeking safe haven Mexico, the U.S. and beyond. Even today they are [still being hunted and killed](#) by the regime.

Ignoring the Peace Accords

In 1996, comprehensive [peace accords](#) were signed that set out serious reforms and changes to remedy most of Guatemala's historic inequalities, injustices and systemic racism, formally ending decades of "internal conflict."

The reforms included, for example, comprehensive land reform, the establishment of the United Nations Truth Commission to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity from 1960-1996, recognition of the rights of refugees to return home to their lands, long-overdue recognition of the rights of Indigenous (mainly Mayan) peoples.

The U.S., Canada, and much of the international community stated publicly they supported the full implementation of the accords, but in practice the countries ignored the reforms by not conditioning future political and economic relations on proper implementation of the accords.

What would Guatemala be like today if these accords had not [been ignored](#) by ensuing Covenant of Corrupt governments and the U.S.-led international community?

What if the U.S., Canada and international community had actually demanded full implementation of and compliance with the accords, instead of getting right back to "business as usual" — maintaining and expanding economic interests with 25 more years of repressive governments controlled by the Covenant of Corrupt elites right through until today?

The past can't be changed, but asking these questions is more than rhetorical. Answering these questions will show what the policies and actions of the U.S., Canada and international community have actually been since 1954.

Hopefully, August 20, 2023, will mark a transformational before-and-after date in Guatemala's history. The incoming Semilla Party government and Guatemalan people are already working — hopefully, cautiously, nervously — to begin to address the almost impossible-to-overcome challenges confronting the needs and well-being of the majority population.

Will U.S. and Canadian governments, politicians and media ask the hard questions and demand serious reforms and changes as to how they exercise and impose our power and interests on small countries around the world, or will they quickly get back to insisting on business as usual in support of their political and economic interests?

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More information

- Rights Action's "Guatemala Election Watch" alerts (www.rightsaction.org/emails)
- Twitter feeds of Festivales Solidarios (@festivalesgt) & Prensa Comunitaria (@PrensaComunitaria)
- Prensa Comunitaria's daily news (<https://prensacomunitaria.org/>)

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