



## GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA

3321 12th St NE Washington, DC 20017 | 202-998-2191 | [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org)

### Summary:

With the first round of presidential elections over, a surprise candidate has made his way through to the next round and presented Guatemala with hope for a change to the status quo and continuously encouraged and facilitated by the government. Bernardo Arévalo and Sandra Torres will begin their run-off election campaigns in hopes of capturing the necessary votes by August. Both candidates face separate challenges but Arévalo, who had never been considered as a front runner, faces a very uphill battle as a result of his staunch anti-corruption stance. Thousands left their ballots blank or null, and following the announcement of the results, several towns had ballot burnings in an act of protest. The Guatemalan electoral tribunal has been asked to nullify results in various areas and uncertainty continues about the legitimacy of the elections. Guatemalan migrants in the United States were largely unable to vote in designated areas due to several failures by the TSE to guarantee voting access to everyone.

### Elections:

- *Arévalo moves on to run-off election against Torres in unprecedented result*

Following elections on June 25th, presidential candidates Sandra Torres, ex-first lady of president Álvaro Colom, of the UNE, and Bernardo Arévalo, son of Juan José Arévalo, Guatemala's first democratically elected president, are heading into run-off elections. Torres, who was seen by many as a favorite to win the election, [received 15%](#) of the total vote while Arévalo, who had been polling at only 2% before the election, managed [nearly 12%](#). These slim margins between the candidates can be partially attributed to the [over 24% of the vote](#) being either null or blank, a sign of the clear discontent felt by many over the current state of [Guatemalan politics](#). Torres and Arévalo will have a bit under two months to mount their next campaigns in the hope of winning the run-off elections which will be held on August 25th.

- *Who is Arévalo and what does his success represent for Guatemala?*

César Bernardo Arévalo de León is the son of former president Juan José Arévalo, the leader who established many of the principles of democracy found in Guatemala today and whose social programs revolutionized the country after years of authoritarianism. Bernardo Arévalo, more than anything else, has run a [campaign in fierce opposition to corruption](#). He only joined politics in 2019 when he helped found the political party Semilla (seed) who, after only having had 6 seats in Congress before, have also had newfound success winning 24 seats following this most recent election. What his unprecedented success suggests above all is the [frustration most Guatemalans feel](#) with the current political status quo and their desire for real, positive change. Arévalo has repeatedly stated that he would recruit prosecutors and judges who have been forced into exile by previous administrations and is not aligned with any major politician currently involved with the current administration. Besides unlikely, an

Arévalo victory would be incredibly symbolic and despite the uphill battle he may face, there are many hopeful he will surprise everyone.

- *Presidential run-off candidate Torres begins aggressive right-leaning run-off campaign*

Sandra Torres will once again enter a run-off presidential election and will be hoping to finally come out on top. Torres, ex-first lady to president Álvaro Colom, finished in second place in the previous two elections losing to both President Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammattei. She had built up her popularity before running for office by presenting herself as an ally to both women and the poor and often being a vehicle for these groups to demand change. Since then, however, Torres has increasingly aligned herself with elite members of Guatemalan society and taken a very soft approach toward corruption. She had even been [arrested for violating campaign finance rules](#) in 2019, but her case was dismissed in 2022. As such, Torres is seen by many as a natural next step in the ever-eroding legitimacy of Guatemalan politics, with her connections to current corrupt officials blatant and her disregard for fighting this corruption even more obvious.

### **Corruption in the Courts:**

- *Several political parties criticize the work of the Guatemalan electoral boards*

Following the elections on June 25th, various political parties have begun filing appeals for annulment of electoral results, while others have begun preparing legal challenges to contest supposed errors made during vote counting. Parties such as Vamos, Voluntad Oportunidad y Solidaridad (VOS), and Cabal have all expressed doubts and concerns over the efficacy of the machines used to count the votes. Many of these challenges also come amidst warnings before the elections concerning electoral fraud as well as post-election protests where [ballot boxes were burned](#) on the street. Additionally, the mayoral race is yet to be called as of June 29th. It is estimated that over 3000 formal challenges have been made against the board. The Guatemalan electoral board has defended its system [claiming it worked perfectly](#) and has said it will address the challenges made by the different parties.

- *Guatemalan government releases military officials convicted of grave crimes*

A Guatemalan appeals court disobeyed a ruling from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) by [ordering the release](#) of three former high-ranking military officers convicted of crimes against humanity. A regional human rights court had previously halted their release in March of 2023, but the appeals court then ruled against it. This case is one of 14 other examples where Guatemala has disregarded rulings by the court which shows a worrying pattern.

- *Guatemalan Electoral Board asks TSE to nullify election results in Chinautla*

The Guatemalan electoral board (JDE) has filed an official report to the electoral tribunal requesting the annulment of the electoral results in the town of Chinautla after riots following the elections led to the [destruction of various ballot boxes](#). According to the JDE, only 12 of the 210 ballot boxes were recovered with all of their votes still intact. while 33 were in police custody and thus were not able to be verified. The riots and protests were

said to have started on the morning of June 26th and continued well into the next day as a result of the reelection of mayor Brenda Elizabeth del Cid Medrano, niece of former mayor Arnolando Medrano who was [accused of diverting funding](#) for over 200 homes in Chinautla that were never built.

- *As the Massacre de Alaska testimonies begin, so do the intimidation tactics*

June 15th marked the beginning of the testimonies by the Massacre de Alaska victims and witnesses, however, they were also accompanied by an [increased military presence](#) in the court waiting rooms in a deliberate intimidation tactic by the Guatemalan government. On the 4th of October, 2012 the government of then president Otto Pérez Molina, massacred six people and injured 40 more during a protest carried out by the K'iche' de Totonicapán Mayan group. While normally the courthouses have two members of the security forces to watch the entrance of the room, four special forces soldiers from the PNC were seen watching over the room in a blatant attempt at intimidating those there.

## **Migration:**

- *Poor election turnout from migrants was attributed to a lack of desire to vote says the TSE, but voters blame poor planning and access*

Only 1443 Guatemalans voted from the US on election day which, while marking a near 100% increase from 2019's 734 voters, is only a tiny margin of the over 90,000 registered voters and over 3 million residing Guatemalans. While the Guatemalan electoral tribunal (TSE) has suggested that voters simply did not want to vote, voters reported incredibly disorganized and ill-prepared sites waiting for them at the voting centers, as well as difficulties reaching the voting sites. 17 voting centers were set up in 15 different cities across the US, but many were not prepared despite the over [19 million Quetzales spent](#) (over \$2 million) on preparations. Many voters in the Los Angeles area, who went to the Guatemalan Embassy in LA to vote, were told to head to San Francisco instead, a nine-hour drive by car. The head of the TSE, Irma Palencia, acknowledged that more than 2000 Guatemalans who arrived at the voting centers in the US were unable to vote but blamed the voters who she claims were either not yet registered to vote or had been registered to different cities.