

8-12-2010

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Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Louisa. "Organization of American States will Audit Guatemala's Electoral Register." (2010).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9814>

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Organization of American States will Audit Guatemala's Electoral Register

by Louisa Reynolds

Category/Department: Guatemala

Published: Thursday, August 12, 2010

Guatemala's Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) announced last week that the 2011 elections should be carried out using the old form of ID—the *cédula de vecindad*—rather than the new Documento Personal de Identificación (DPI), after more than 6,000 copies of the new ID card were found to be faulty.

The Registro Nacional de las Personas (RENAP), set up in 2007 to produce the new DPI, has been plagued with corruption and is currently under investigation by the attorney general's office (Ministerio Público, MP), after former RENAP director Enrique Cossich alerted the authorities about the possible forgery of ID cards (([NotiCen, 2010-07-21](#)))

Delays in production of the DPI have also meant that it is likely that the government's original target of replacing the *cédula* by the end of this year, in time for the 2011 elections, will not be met.

The proposal that the elections should be held using the old form of ID was put forward as part of a bill to modify the current Ley del RENAP that the TSE presented to Congress.

"The biometric system for both fingerprints and facial recognition failed as a person was given two ID cards with identical codes," said TSE president María Eugenia Villagrán. "Many citizens who have applied for their new DPI have had their name, date and place of birth, and marital status changed. As long as these errors are not put right, these people cannot be included in the electoral register."

Villagrán explained that the TSE's information-technology department has detected some irregularities with the DPI but others could go unnoticed. "Irregularities such as changes in a citizen's name and date and place of birth are not detected by our system. As we don't want to pollute the electoral register, we have made the decision to use the *cédula* for the forthcoming elections."

Villagrán made it clear that the TSE is not calling for the DPI production to be stopped and that 18 year olds who are issued their first ID card and who have never had a *cédula* as well as other people who do not have the old form of ID "for legitimate reasons"—for example, cases in which the person's documents have been stolen—will be allowed to use the DPI.

She further explained that when the TSE detects irregularities with people's DPIs, they are contacted by the Registro de Ciudadanos and requested to return their documents to RENAP and request a new ID card before they can enroll and vote.

OAS will audit electoral register

The irregularities found in the production of the new DPI and the RENAP corruption scandal have raised concerns about a plan to commit electoral fraud. To dispel such fears, the Organization of American States (OAS) began a four-month audit of the electoral register last week.

This audit will be conducted by eight OAS experts who will carry out the necessary checks throughout the country, says Pablo Gutiérrez, OAS director for cooperation and electoral observation.

Gutiérrez explains that the OAS will verify the technical procedures used to produce the electoral register and will issue recommendations to the Guatemalan government to improve security and transparency. Of a total population of almost 13 million, 6.2 million Guatemalans have enrolled to vote in 2011 and 45,000 have already been issued a DPI.

Villagrán adds that the OAS audit will allow the TSE "to rectify errors and purge the electoral register before the election process begins." She also emphasized that the last audit carried out by the OAS in 2005 concluded that the information in Guatemala's electoral register was 98% accurate.

Nevertheless, Roxana Baldetti, chair of the Partido Patriota (PP), the country's main opposition party, said at least two further audits ought to be carried out as "unfortunately, the OAS has proven that it cannot be trusted."

Roberto Alejos, president of Congress, further announced that a special commission would be set up, including representatives from the country's main political parties as well as TSE and RENAP officials, to examine various proposals to amend the Ley del RENAP, which regulates how the institution must operate and sets the deadline for replacing the *cédula de vecindad* with the DPI.

So far, three different bills have been put forward: one by the TSE, another by Roxana Baldetti, which has already been approved by the congressional electoral affairs commission (Comisión de Asuntos Electorales del Legislativo), and a third, put forward by Congresswoman Rosa María de Frade of the Bancada Guatemala faction.

The new bill will seek, among other things, to make it easier to remove RENAP's board of directors, after Mauricio Radford, the legislature's representative, was recently removed on corruption charges.

Alejos pledged that, once the commission has agreed on a final draft, it will be debated in Congress as an urgent issue of national importance.

CICIG investigates top RENAP officials

The Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG) is currently investigating 14 public officials from RENAP, accused of conspiring to commit fraud in the tendering process to grant a multimillion-dollar contract to Easy Marketing, the corporation in charge of producing the DPI, which will replace the *cédula de vecindad*.

CICIG says the US\$114.8 million contract between RENAP and Easy Marketing, signed in December 2006 for producing the DPI, infringes the state purchases and contracts law (Ley de Compras y Contrataciones del Estado).

"The terms of the contract state that any legal dispute must be settled by the New York Supreme Court, which leaves Guatemala at a disadvantage. These officials are also under investigation because of serious irregularities in the DPI production," said Judge Verónica Galicia.

The accused include former interior minister Francisco Jiménez, former RENAP director Enrique Cossich, Mauricio Radford, recently removed as congressional representative on RENAP's board of directors, and Patricia Cervantes, TSE representative on the board.

However, Francisco Campos, spokesperson for Sagem Sécurité, Easy Marketing's parent company, denies any irregularities in the tendering process, saying, "It was all open to public scrutiny. There has rarely been a more open tendering process in this country."

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