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## Guatemala: Pre-election Update

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 11, Guatemalans will elect a president and vice president, 116 congresspersons, 20 deputies to the Central American parliament, and 300 mayors. Recent estimates indicate that 3.2 million citizens are eligible to vote. To avoid a Jan. 6 run-off, the lead candidate must receive a majority of all votes cast, or over 50%. Nov. 4: Former general Efraín Ríos Montt once again called on supporters to write his name on their ballots, thereby excluding the same in the vote count for all national offices. He said this "passive resistance" to his exclusion from the race will ensure that "the president who is elected is legal but not legitimate." While supporters burned two replicas of the constitution, Ríos Montt denounced the constitutional court judges, who he said had "twisted and showed disrespect for the law." Alvaro Arzu, presidential candidate for the National Advance Party (PAN), told a crowd of 10,000 that if elected he would put an end to extreme poverty. Arzu said, "In five years we will do away with the extreme poverty which affects Guatemala and we will make this the greatest nation in Latin America." Nov. 6: AFP cited a poll showing Jorge Carpio Nicolle of the National Center Union (UCN) in the lead with 23%, followed by Arzu with 16%, and Jorge Serrano Elias of the Movement of Solidarity Action (MAS) with 13%. Only 10% of the respondents said they planned to vote for ruling Christian Democrat party candidate, Alfonso Cabrera. Nov. 7: Ríos Montt supporter, congressional candidate Francisco Fuentes Parra, lodged an appeal to halt the elections do to Ríos Montt's exclusion. General manager of voter registration, Félix Castillo Milla, said that he turned the appeal over the Supreme Electoral Tribunal which has three days to respond. The Associated Press cited a poll which showed that 29% of respondents said they plan to cast blank ballots. Nov. 8: The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) ran ads in several papers urging citizens to boycott the vote. The URNG asserted that refusing to vote is a way of exercising a citizen's rights and expressing opposition to an unjust social regime, its structures and institutions. According to the URNG, institutional and constitutional reforms, including demilitarization, must precede elections in order to guarantee free expression of the citizenry's preferences. Defense Minister Gen. Juan Leonel Bolanos announced that the army will respect election results and that 10,000 troops will be on duty to guarantee security during elections. President Vinicio Cerezo discounted talk of a military coup following the elections. He added, "The electoral process is in the hands of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the Guatemalan people." Cerezo asserted that election polls showing the Christian Democrat candidate in fourth place were inaccurate. UNC presidential candidate Carpio Nicolle promised his supporters he would end violence and "make Guatemala an emporium of riches where there are no poor." UNC party leader Jorge Cannale said, "We are not offering dreams, but reality." ACAN-EFE reported that Carpio leads with 21%, followed by Arzu with 17% and Serrano Elias with 15%. Presidency Minister Gen. Carlos Morales denied the existence of death squads and blamed violence instead on organized crime. (Basic data from EFE, 11/04/90, 11/08/90; ACAN-EFE, 11/04/90, 11/08/90; AFP, 11/06/90; AP, 11/07/90, 11/08/90)

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