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Guatemala: On General Election Results

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 13, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal announced that presidential candidates Jorge Carpio Nicolle (National Center Union-UCN) and Jorge Serrano (Solidarity Action Movement-MAS) received the largest number of votes in the Nov. 11 election, and will compete in the Jan. 6 runoff. Under Guatemalan law, a candidate must receive a majority of valid ballots to avoid a runoff. Vote count results as reported by Notimex follow: Of a total 1,546,337 valid ballots, Carpio Nicolle received 25.72%; Serrano Elias, 24.21%; Christian Democrat Party candidate Alfonso Cabrera, 17.48%; and, National Advance Party (PAN) candidate Alvaro Arzu, 17.29%. No one of the remaining eight candidates received more than 5% of the vote. Abstention defined as registered voters who stayed at home, invalid and blank votes cast totaled 51% of slightly more than 3.2 million registered voters. Five percent of the ballots were invalid. Abstention in the 1985 general elections was 26%. Carpio Nicolle is a co-founder of the UCN which dates from 1984. His running mate, economist Manuel Ayau, a free trade advocate, helped establish the Francisco Marroquin University which promotes his trade liberalization philosophy. The UCN platform consisted of "peace, justice and well-being"; reductions of the government budget, unemployment, inflation, and crime; and, economic growth through export expansion. Carpio Nicolle holds a degree in political science, has worked as a journalist, and currently owns the daily newspaper El Grafico. In the 1985 election, he participated in the run-off, and lost to Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo. Serrano's platform can be summarized as follows: "meeting the needs of the dispossessed," combined with promoting economic development; economic liberalization while "taking into account the nation's realities." An engineer by profession, and a fundamentalist Christian, Serrano headed the president's advisory council under the administration of Efraim Rios Montt (1982-84), and helped draft the nation's electoral legislation. He served as a member of the National Reconciliation Commission, created in fulfillment of the 1987 regional peace accords, and has participated in peace negotiations with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). During the campaign, Cabrera and running mate Marco Antonio Villamar stressed improvements for the marginalized indigenous population, distributing wealth "without taking it away from those who have it," and strengthening democracy and ending poverty along the lines established by the Cerezo administration. An educator by profession, Cabrera has served as president of the national congress, special affairs minister and foreign minister during the Cerezo government. Arzu and running mate, Federico Linares (former central bank president), said asserted during their campaign that "before distributing the wealth, it must be produced." Their platform consisted of promising economic growth and trade liberalization. Arzu's has worked as a promoter and entrepreneur in the tourism industry, and is a former mayor of Guatemala City. Under the government of Gen. Romeo Lucas (1978-82), he served as Tourism Institute director. On other races, PAN candidate Oscar Berger Perdomo was elected mayor of Guatemala City with 32% of the vote. PAN candidates also took the greatest number of seats in the national legislature, with 23.87% of all ballots cast in respective races, compared to 22% for former general Rios Montt's coalition; MAS, 21.23%; UCN, 15.43%; and the Christian Democrats, 6.85%. The elections cost approximately \$3.5 million. Of the 418 international observers present, 167 were from the US, 177 were Latin American, 58 were from the European Community, and 16 represented international groups such as the Organization of American States and the Socialist

International. Events on election day are summarized below. * In Guatemala City police and armed soldiers patrolled the streets in jeeps. Armed civilian patrols were in evidence in the highlands. In most locations throughout the country, security was left to the police. * According to the local media, in San Marcos department "anti-government groups" painted billboards with the slogan, "Why vote?" * Protesters littered several streets and avenues of Guatemala City with three-pronged nails in attempts to dissuade capital city residents from voting. * A special subsidy allowed people to ride buses free of charge. Stores and other businesses were closed, and the sale of alcoholic beverages was banned throughout the day. * Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Joao Baena Soares, on hand to observe the elections, pronounced them "clean." * For the first time in Guatemalan history, blind citizens were registered to vote, and provided with ballots in Braille. A total of 3,000 registered. (Basic data from AFP, 11/09-12/90; AP, 11/11/90, 11/12/90; Notimex, 11/10/90, 11/12/90, 11/13/90)

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