

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Sam Ordóñez
13.06.2019

Guatemalans to vote amid corruption scandals and migration



Presidential and congressional elections will be held in Guatemala on June 16. They have the potential to be significant, due to the deep political crisis and continuing northward migration that shows no signs of ending.

Another factor that might influence the elections is that, for the first time, Guatemalans living in other countries will be allowed to vote. Currently very few of these voters are registered, but given the trend of migration and the economic weight of remittances, they could become an important group.

A noteworthy characteristic of the political crisis is the fact that several important, influential political parties have been disbanded by the courts. On the other hand, a number of new parties on both the left and the right have emerged.

The two biggest right-wing parties, given the number of congressional seats won in the last election, have been disbanded due to repeated violation of campaign financing laws. Others, including current President Jimmy Morales's party, are in open legal proceedings, which have been suspended until after the elections.

According to opinion polls, the frontrunner is Sandra Torres, candidate for the National Unity of Hope (UNE) party. UNE is a social-democratic party that has some proposals that would alleviate the masses' suffering without fundamentally changing economic structures. Like all the traditional Guatemalan parties, UNE has a long history of alleged corruption and investigations into campaign financing.

Another notable candidate, who has been gaining steam in the latest polls, is Thelma Cabrera, an Indigenous (Maya Mam) woman running in the Movement for the Liberation of the Peoples (MLP). MLP is an electoral vehicle recently formed by the Peasant Development Committee (Codeca) and other allied social movements.

This party was formed after a split between Codeca and the URNG, a party formed by the revolutionary guerillas after the peace accords. Due to its origin as a social movement, MLP has a strong base among the peasantry and Indigenous communities in the South Coast and Plateau regions of the country.

As a party representing primarily the interests of the peasantry and Indigenous peoples, MLP has frequently referred to Bolivian President Evo Morales and the "economic miracle" that his country is experiencing as a major political inspiration. Its proposals include renationalizing the electrical company, revising the concessions granted to companies to exploit natural resources, and convening a Popular and Plurinational Constituent Assembly.

Although UNE leads the polls on voting intentions, these polls also indicate that about 66 percent of voters are not even expressing a voting preference. That is unsurprising, given that the political crisis has greatly damaged the credibility of the traditional parties, and the fact that the political left is still recovering from its loss in Guatemala's civil war.

Disqualified candidates

Judicial intervention has played an important role in determining the balance of forces disputing the current elections. For example, Zury Ríos, daughter and ideological heir of

genocidal dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, was briefly promoted as a candidate who would unify the right-wing factions, but was disqualified by the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE). Thelma Aldana was the candidate for the Seed Movement, a party based in the urban professional classes, which emerged as a result of mass protests in 2015, ultimately forcing then President Otto Pérez Molina to resign. This party is relatively progressive, although it is focused mostly on combating corruption. When the government issued an order for her arrest, Aldana was forced into exile in neighboring El Salvador, and a few weeks later was disqualified for alleged corruption.

A prominent right-wing candidate from the Union of National Change party was disqualified after being arrested in Miami on drug trafficking charges. According to U.S. authorities, this candidate was working with the Sinaloa cartel and using the money from deals to both finance his campaign and order assassinations of political rivals, including Aldana. (tinyurl.com/y54aczox)

Economic misery due to corruption, underdevelopment, drought

When faced with large anti-corruption mobilizations, the political crisis began with the resignation of the president and his entire cabinet in 2015. In recent years it has been focused on the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). This U.N.-backed commission has been the source of many investigations targeting traditional politicians and has in turn been a target of the right wing.

For the progressive movement, ending corruption and impunity has become the highest priority, since these block any solution to the structural problems driving northward migration.

The right wing has held a virtual monopoly on power ever since the 1954 coup d'état overthrew the Guatemalan Revolution and led to a 36-year civil war. This monopoly was briefly interrupted by the social-democratic government of Alvaro Colom (ex-husband of Sandra Torres), but there was little or no lasting change.

The general policy of the Guatemalan ruling class has been to favor big business, powerful landlords and transnational corporations and to oppress the working class, peasantry and Indigenous peoples. At the height of the civil war, there was even open genocide against the Indigenous Ixil Maya people.

As a result of this monopoly on power, Guatemala is now a country where most essential services has been privatized, infrastructure is on the verge of collapse, and the economy depends entirely on a combination of foreign investment, remittances and export agriculture.

The oligarchy has no interest in developing the country's industrial capability, despite inviting transnational mining projects. Almost all the raw materials produced by the country, including the large agricultural sector, are exported. The business class is more than happy to continue sending raw materials out of the country and selling back finished products. As long as the oligarchs get their cut, profits leave the country without any of the barriers faced by migrants.

Conservative policies have also caused tremendous environmental destruction. The Indigenous peoples of the country, be they Maya, Xinka or Garifuna, are in a constant struggle with the state to protect their lands and rivers from extractivist projects like mines. Most of the country's forests have been levelled to create the large plantations that grow coffee, palm oil and other crops destined for the world markets. What forests remain are under constant threat.

That environmental destruction, coupled with the appropriation of the most fertile land for large plantations, has created a desperate situation for many Guatemalans. Despite being an agricultural economy, the country doesn't produce enough food to feed itself. Malnutrition rates are incredibly high, and nothing has managed to make a dent in them.

In peasant communities where food is grown, several years of drought linked to climate change have caused repeated crop failures. A June 5 article in the New York Times quoted several families who pointed to the droughts as the reason their children left for the U.S.

What the Times is unwilling to admit is that subsistence agriculture communities have been forced off the most fertile lands, which have been able to withstand the recent droughts due to centuries of colonialism and imperialism. If the land that is today used for coffee and other cash crops were repurposed to grow corn, beans and other staple foods, the country would not be on the brink of collapse.

June 11, 2019