

Two candidates killed days before election in Guatemala

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GUATEMALA CITY --

Two candidates from Nobel Laureate and presidential hopeful Rigoberta Menchú's party were shot dead Wednesday amid a wave of campaign-related violence that has claimed about 50 victims.

Wenceslao Ayapán, 35, and Esmeralda Uyún, 26, of the Encuentro Por Guatemala Party were killed by assailants with automatic weapons, party officials said. The two were running for seats in the municipality of San Raymundo, 20 miles north of Guatemala City.

About 50 politicians, activists and their relatives have been killed during the past four months of campaigning to replace the president, federal lawmakers and local officials in the election Sunday.

Menchú, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work on behalf of indigenous people, is the first Mayan woman ever to run for president in Guatemala, where nearly half of the population is Mayan.

But she has gained little support and is a distant sixth with 3.1 percent support, according to a poll conducted by Vox Latina for the newspaper Prensa Libre that was published Wednesday.

The survey found that Otto Pérez Molina, a retired general running with the Patriotic Party who promises to be tough on crime, had 31.8 percent compared to 31.7 percent for Alvaro Colom, a three-time candidate from the centrist National Unity of Hope party.

If no candidate wins more than 50 percent of the vote, the top two advance to a runoff Nov. 4.

Ruling party candidate Alejandro Giammatei was third with 14.6 percent.

The rest of those polled said they would vote for one of 10 other candidates or were undecided.

The poll surveyed 1,200 registered voters by asking them to fill out sample ballots between Aug. 29 and Sept. 3. It had a margin of error of 4 percentage points.