

Guatemalan Presidential Elections

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On Sept. 9, 2007, voters in Guatemala elected local leaders, legislators and a president to succeed **Oscar Berger** of the center-right Grand National Alliance (GAN) party. [Guatemalan voters](#) have not returned an incumbent party to power since 1986. More than half of the country's 6 million registered voters cast ballots in Sunday's election.

Results of Sunday's voting showed the election would go to a [runoff](#) on Nov. 4, as no candidate received more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round. The new president is expected to be sworn in to a four-year term on Jan. 14, 2008.

Violence has dominated the elections, affecting all political parties and making crime and corruption main campaign issues. At least 50 candidates, party workers or political activists [have been killed](#) in the last year, making the 2007 race the most violent since the end of the civil war in 1996. Presidential and congressional candidates have taken extra security measures as family members have also become targets of attacks. Guatemala has seen a rise in its murder rate in recent years, pressuring the candidates to address organized crime and reformation of the police and justice systems.

In 1996, Guatemala signed a peace accord that ended a 36-year armed conflict. Now, the country is a U.S. trade ally under CAFTA. However, the European Union and the Organization of American States, monitors of the vote, expressed concern about the level of election-related violence in the 2007 campaign.

Álvaro Colom, 56, of the center-left Nation Unity for Hope (UNE), is a businessman who proposes an overhaul of the justice system and an increase in social spending to fight poverty. He is in his third bid for the presidency; in 2003, he lost to incumbent President **Oscar Berger** of the GANA party in a runoff election. Colom led early polls for the 2007 race, but he will have to compete in a runoff vote in November. As with Berger, Colom is unlikely to lead a majority in Congress should he gain the presidency.

Otto Pérez Molina, 56, of the center-right Patriot Party (PP), is a former general and has been campaigning on a "firm hand" platform, promising to bring law and order to a country with high crime rates and violence linked to drug traffickers.

Alejandro Giammattei, 50, is the candidate for the incumbent GANA party. Giammattei, a former director of the country's prison system, ran in past elections for Guatemala City mayor.

Rigoberta Menchú, 48, candidate of the new Encounter for Guatemala (EG) party, is a Mayan indigenous rights activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

Efraín Ríos Montt, 81, who is running for Congress, was a general and briefly president during the violent period between March 1982 and August 1983. Montt heads the list of candidates for the right-wing Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), one of the largest parties in the country. If he wins, Montt will receive immunity for the four years of his term from a lawsuit brought by Menchu and other human rights activists charging him with genocide. Montt finished third in the first round of the 2003 presidential election.

POLLS

With more than 96 percent of the vote counted, Colom had 28 percent of the vote, winning majorities in 16 of Guatemala's 22 states. Pérez Molina got 24 percent of the votes, with a strong showing in heavily populated Guatemala City. Giammattei collected 17 percent of the vote, and Menchú trailed with 3 percent.