

Anti-poverty, anti-crime candidates face runoff in Guatemala

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GUATEMALA CITY --

A tough-on-crime former general and a businessman who wants to solve Guatemala's problems by fighting poverty will meet in a Nov. 4 presidential runoff, according to results Monday from a first round of elections.

Alvaro Colom, a businessman making his third run for the presidency, had a 28 percent to 24 percent lead over Otto Perez of the conservative Patriot Party, with 96 percent of the votes counted.

Sunday's vote sheared away 10 other less-popular candidates, among them Nobel Laureate and Mayan activist Rigoberta Menchu, who got 3 percent.

Perez has stressed the need to crackdown on crime as a way to create growth, while Colom says the fight against crime should start with job creation in a country where 51 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.

Guatemala is Central America's most violent country and a corridor for Colombian cocaine heading to the United States.

Perez, who has denied overseeing massacres during the 1960-96 civil war, promises to hire more police officers, use the military to fight drug gangs and institute the death penalty.

Colom proposes an increase in social spending and an overhaul of the judicial system.

About 50 candidates, party activists and their family members died in the runup to Sunday's voting, which was monitored by more than 34,000 police and soldiers.

On Monday, about 700 people who rejected the mayor's re-election in the town of Santa Maria de Jesus, about 30 miles west of Guatemala City, threatened to burn down city hall, said Olympia Pineda, a spokeswoman with Guatemala's national police.

Electoral magistrate Angel Figueroa said officials were considering tossing out local results in at least eight towns: "If we determine that more than 30 percent of the ballots were destroyed, we will have to repeat the election" during the runoff, he said.

Menchu is the first Mayan woman to run for president in Guatemala, where 42 percent of the population is Mayan. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her human rights work following Guatemala's brutal civil war that killed 200,000 people, most of them Mayans.