

Election Observation Report: Special Mayoral Election in the Municipality of Nebaj, January 12, 2014

A citizen exercise in strengthening Guatemalan democracy

Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj present to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the donors, and to the political organizations involved in the Observe Nebaj project, the results of the election observation for the municipal election held in Nebaj on January 12, 2014. The report emphasizes the conditions of electoral development, as well as the evolution of how election results were scrutinized and disseminated. The report is based on the reports submitted by 63 observers deployed by Acción Ciudadana working with Observe Nebaj – together we monitored 57 polling stations spread across eight constituencies of the municipality.

1. Objectives of the Observation Project:

The Objectives set forth by this project were achieved satisfactorily, and entirely.

General Objective:

To ensure a healthy, transparent, and reliable electoral process.

Specific Objectives:

- Observe, monitor, and supervise the electoral process from the opening of the polling stations, through the counting of votes, and certification of results by the polling board.
- Collect real and accurate results from each polling station.
- Publish the results of the elections directly from information collected by the observation project.

The announcement that 75 observers would participate in the project generated confidence in the electoral process, both in the population and among the candidates, who spoke positively about the observation mission.

We are pleased to have contributed, if even on a small scale, to a peaceful, healthy, transparent and credible election in Nebaj. However small, our contribution highlights the commitment to democratic participation by the people of Nebaj.

2. Report on Volunteer Training Day, January 11, 2014

One day before the special elections, Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj trained 67 volunteers. Each volunteer was trained in basic issues concerning democratic principles, citizen participation in the electoral process, and the role of observers for effective observation

throughout the entire election process. The training was divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The exercises and training ended in a series of simulated observation situations between the volunteers. A kit of materials was delivered to each of the volunteers which included: Accreditation from the TSE as an official observer, a T-shirt, official observations forms, an Election Observation Handbook and a copy of the Electoral Law and Regulation of Political Parties. A group supervisor was appointed to each observer in order to facilitate communications, logistics, and administrative issues. Similarly, with the help of a database, each volunteer assigned to a polling station was presented a stipend to cover the costs of transportation and food. Thanks to these activities, we were able to conduct a successful training which empowered citizens, especially Maya Ixil citizens of Nebaj to use objective criteria to observe the electoral process and exercise responsible citizenship. The training formed a group of committed, responsible, and determined observers, each eager to contribute to the realization of fair and transparent elections in Nebaj.

3. Organization and Logistics:

The report showed normal development the morning of election day.

- 100 percent of polling stations were installed before 8 a.m.
- 99 percent of total polling stations were installed and staffed.
- In all polling stations there were more than two representatives from different parties.
- 98 percent of polling stations reported they had total material and supplies necessary for a smooth election.

Although observers reported their access had been restricted to the polling station installation process in two communities, we were able to immediately communicate with the President of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal Electoral Board and the President of Nebaj's Municipal Electoral Board, which resulted in immediate admission of the volunteers. Citizen Action and Observe Nebaj would like to recognize TSE and the Nebaj Municipal Electoral Board for excellent management in the organization and logistics of the election day.

4. The Development of Election Day:

A.) Impact of the personal documentation of the electoral process. Before the election, there was fear of reaction to the election in Nebaj by those who lacked accurate information about the electoral process and results. Many citizens feared they would be allowed to participate in the election only if they had voted in the original 2011 mayoral election. The observation project reported that 53.85 percent of polling stations had new voters who did not participate in the 2011 election.

For the citizens of Nebaj, personal documentation was not a barrier to cast their votes. Observers of the municipal electoral mission witnessed some citizens who voted with their Neighborhood Certificate, accompanied by proof of a pending DPI issued by the RENAP which was allowed under a TSE resolution.

B.) Conditions of Secret Voting: Observers reported that 63 percent of polling stations had conditions in place to ensure the secrecy of the vote. However, observers located in the center of the City Hall polling told us they observed the presence of some individuals that stood near the voting booths, putting pressure on the voter. It concerns Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj that 37 percent of polling stations reported a lack of conditions to ensure the secrecy of the vote. Observe Nebaj and Acción Ciudadana recommend to TSE to make improvements to these lack of conditions for the next general election, as this exercise served to make a more detailed observation of elections in Nebaj.

C.) Obstacles Citizens Faced in Voting: It was reported that 37 percent of polling stations encountered people who could not vote. This report has identified three common reasons citizens of Nebaj were barred from voting. 1.) They did not appear on the voter registration logs. 2.) They did not know where to vote due to lack of information; and 3.) Insufficient ballots. One isolated case also reported a citizen leaving a voting center reporting she was unable to vote because someone had already voted for her. A lack of information resulted in some citizens leaving the voting centers unhappy, furthering the possibility for disruption of peaceful elections in Nebaj.

D.) Procedures for the Closing and Counting of Votes: The vote counting process proceeded normally within normal parameters of the previous elections except that results were reported much earlier than expected. The work of the polling stations was efficient in transmitting data to the computer center in Guatemala City.

E.) Appeals: In 13 percent of the polling stations observed, vote challenges were presented. A vote challenge signifies the ballot was disputed between the accredited representatives of the present political parties. The largest number of vote challenges was against the standing mayor, demonstrating the rights of political organizations in the use of media to present disagreements.

5. Incidents which Affected the Development of Elections:

Between noon on Saturday, January 11, 2014 and the closing of the polls on January 12, 2014, several complaints in the Anti-Corruption Legal Assistance Centre (ALAC) Citizen Action were received. The principal incidents were:

- The buying of votes.
- The presence of public officials (Members of Congress) who are not constituents of the polling districts taking photographs and making propaganda.
- Compromises to a secret vote.
- Persons who tried to vote, only to discover someone had used their name already. Several of these reports were corroborated by Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj volunteers.

- Electoral violence.

Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj congratulate the population of Nebaj for the demonstration of maturity and political responsibility on election day, which exceeded expectations that existed over possible conflict in Nebaj.

However, it should be noted that the day before the elections on Saturday January 11, some clashes between the two favorite political parties, the coalition UNE-GANA and the Patriot Party were reported. Internal conflicts that played out along party lines within the local government of Nebaj resulted in physical violence between some supporters. The Guatemalan media reported these confrontations in the national news.

6. Rapid Counting of Voting Results:

Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj deployed 57 observers in 57 polling stations across eight communities in the municipality of Nebaj, and reported data collected from the official records when the polling stations closed. This step is important in making voting transparent as it allows the TSE to observe the counting of votes and the taking of data. It also allowed for a comparison between the official results with that of the Observation mission. The end result was a correlation between the official results, and the initial quick count, with more than 57 polling stations reporting. Approximately 96 percent of the assigned data was collected from assigned tables by observers. The successful logistical and organizational development of Nebaj's Municipal elections, and a counting process that remained unhindered resulted in 80 percent of polling stations reporting results as early as 8 p.m. The municipal electoral observation mission was able to cover 76 percent of polling stations, while fielding the highest number of observers. The margin of error of the estimate of the vote count, was + / - 0.07 given the size of data collected compared to the total number of installed tables.

Datasheet:

Total Voting Stations Installed:	75
Total Voting Stations Observed:	57
Margin of Error	0.07

Observation Data:

Political Party	Observer Data	Official Data
UNE-GANA	51%	51%

PP	46%	46%
LIDER	1%	1%
COTON	1%	1%
WINAQ	1%	1%
VIVA	0%	0%
UCN	0%	0%
CASA	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

Voting Trends By Rural and Urban Populations:

Population	PP	COTON	LIDER	UCN	WINAQ	VIVA	CASA	UNE-GANA	Total	%
Urban	3567	53	67	16	38	45	10	3756	7552	46%
Rural	4009	55	95	29	54	22	37	4542	8843	54%

7.) Acknowledgements:

Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj publically acknowledge the successful management by the TSE, the Departmental Board of Santa Cruz del Quiché and Nebaj Municipal Board, as well as the work of the 75 polling stations which ensured objective conditions for the citizens to vote in fair elections.

We thank the TSE for facilitating the conditions necessary for the Observation Mission to develop successfully, as well as for it's positive, open attitude which existed from the inception of an observation project to the accreditation of our 75 observers.

Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj would like to recognize and thank the 29 international donors for the Observe Nebaj Project. Without the financial support of our donors there would have been no observation effort. It is worth mentioning that all our donors are U.S. citizens, who through their donations show a commitment to contributing to transparency and the strengthening of democracy in Guatemala, particularly in the municipality of Nebaj, El Quiché. We also thank all those friends and fellow organizations that helped us campaign and fundraise so we could reach our goal. Special thanks to HablaCentro Informatics NFP team leader, Kara

Andrade, Erick Sundelof, Brad Eller and volunteer Ben Parker for their valuable contribution and support provided in the development of Observe Nebaj, the donation of cameras and other materials used for this project; without the support and backing HablaCentro Informatics NFP and Ben Parker this project would not have been successful.

Finally, Acción Ciudadana and Observe Nebaj deeply appreciates the willingness of the 63 volunteers who worked in eight communities around Nebaj to monitor elections throughout the day as well as, the volunteer work of the many people helping at the quick vote count center. This show of civic duty and pride raises the status of Nebajenses; they are now key political actors in the construction of democracy and popular participation in political decision-making.