

August 2023

# Run-off election in Guatemala

## Post-election report



# Key takeaways of the report

**1** Bernardo Arévalo of Movimiento Semilla was elected president for the 2024-2028 term with **58.01% of the votes**. His denunciation of the corruption of the political class and his commitment to economic and social change in the country would be the keys to explain his electoral achievement.

**3** Now the great challenge for the new president is to **build governance**. To do so, he will need to build **agreements in the Legislative Branch, where he is a minority**. This could be complex since most of it will be controlled by the parties that Movimiento Semilla denounces as part of the "corrupt pact" that governs Guatemala.

**2** The electoral day went smoothly. **There was a lower turnout than in the first round but also a lower level of blank and null votes**. Thus, Arévalo obtained more than 4 times the votes of the first round and achieved an important social support.

**4** The current president, **Alejandro Giammattei**, congratulated Sunday's winner and **predicted an effective transition**. However, until the transfer of power on January 14, 2024, **Movimiento Semilla could have some hurdles to overcome**, particularly the investigations launched by the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI in Spanish), which tried to prevent its participation in the elections. Thus, the judicial level could add uncertainty to Arevalo's effective arrival to power.

# Who won?

Árevalo will be the next president

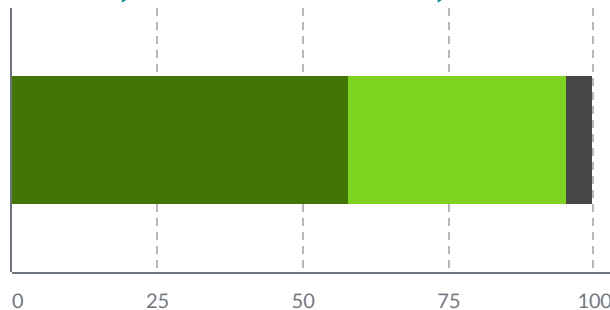


Bernardo Arévalo

58,01%

Sandra Torres

37,24%



Source: Own elaboration based on 100% of the votes counted by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

With all the votes counted, **Bernardo Arévalo** obtained well **over 50% of the votes** and won the **presidency of Guatemala for the next four years**. Facing a government that is expected to be plagued with challenges, **the Semilla candidate obtained more than 2.4 million votes**, four times more than in the first round. Based on this support, he will seek to build legitimacy and consensus to push his government program.

The **difference with Sandra Torres was more than 20%**. For the UNE candidate this was the third defeat in a runoff, being the second with the largest difference after having lost in 2015 against Jimmy Morales having obtained in that opportunity only 34.52% of the votes.

On the other hand, the election was marked by a **substantial drop in the "angry" vote**, or what is the same, the 25% of people who had voted blank or null in the first round opted for one or the other candidate, since these values dropped to **4.75% of the votes**.

# New president and proposals

## Bernardo Arévalo

### Profile

Sociologist with a diplomatic career. He is the son of the first democratically elected president in the country, Juan José Arévalo. He is one of the founders of Movimiento Semilla in 2017, a progressive and environmentalist party that promotes the reduction of inequality from the redistribution of wealth.

He has been a deputy in the Congress of Guatemala since 2020 and came to the competition for the Presidency with a reformist discourse against corruption and the political class.

### Proposals

- Simplifying the formalization of employment
  - Consolidation of social protection and assistance programs
  - Transition to an economy based on regenerative, clean and circular production.
  - Strengthening of security institutions
  - Creation of state-owned company with a network of public pharmacies
  - Anti-corruption package
    - Create an Anti-Corruption Cabinet
    - Forming an Anti-Corruption Oversight Commission
- Elaborate a new National Open Government Plan.
  - Reform of laws on transparency and probity
  - Review of government contracts
  - Combat smuggling and tax evasion in ports.
  - Implement a Code of Ethics in business-State relations.
  - Impossibility to hold public office for those convicted of corruption.



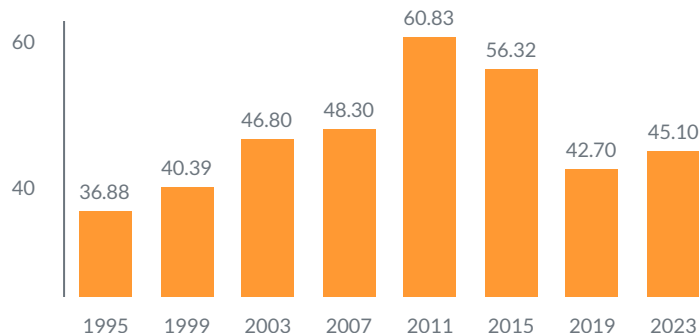
# What were the key points of the day?

## Participation and the behavior of the "angry vote".

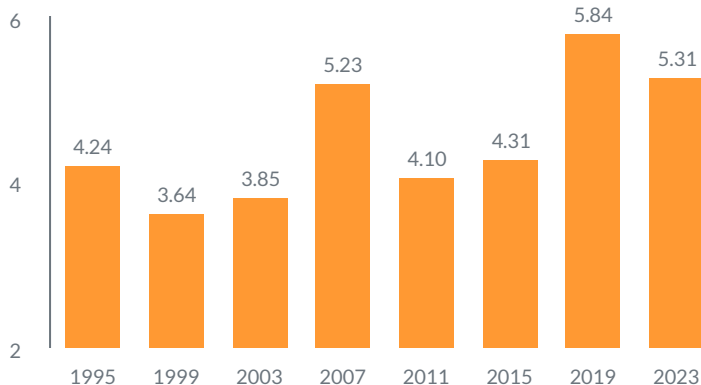
The day was different from what happened in the first electoral round. In Guatemala the **presidency has been defined in every election since 1995 in a runoff**, and always in such second round the participation has been lower.

In this case, this process was verified, **with a drop of 15.4% between the first and second round**. Taking the average turnout of the last 8 ballots (47.16), yesterday's election was slightly below. However, the positive thing is that there was a **higher turnout compared to the election of Alejandro Giammattei in 2019**.

### Run-off turnout



### Run-off "Angry" vote

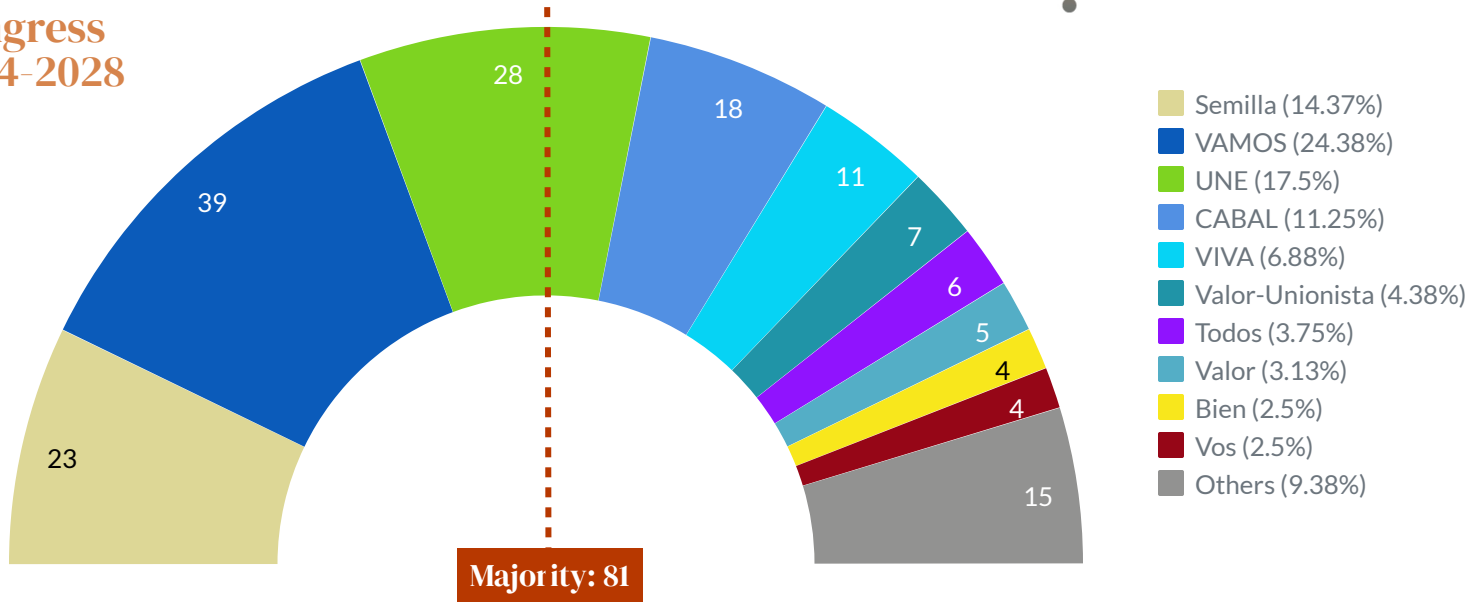


Another factor to be observed on Sunday was **the level of blank, null and invalid votes**. In the first round, these values had been the most chosen by the citizenship, reaching **25%** of the votes cast. For comparison, Arevalo had managed to enter the second round with **11.78%** of the votes.

Yesterday, citizens opted to vote for one candidate or the other and this allowed a substantial **decrease in the "angry" vote**. Thus, it was only 5.31%, still above the average of the second round elections in the country, but below what happened in 2019. Thus, **Arevalo can breathe easy because the high popular support obtained will give him an endorsement of legitimacy to face his mandate**.

# Relations with the future Congress

## Congress 2024-2028



Majority: 81

Arévalo succeeded in winning the Presidency. However, now his **next challenge will be to build governability and for this the key will be the construction of his own legislative majority**. Currently, the Movimiento Semilla's block has 23 deputies, far from the **simple majority -81 out of 160-** in Congress.

The need for agreements and the capacity to build them effectively will become more complex since most of the Legislative Branch **will be dominated by conservative parties that are part of the country's political establishment**. With his discourse denouncing the ruling parties, it is likely that **Arévalo will find it difficult to build consensus with these spaces**.

The main forces to which the new president will have to turn to will be the **outgoing ruling party (VAMOS) with 39 seats, UNE with 28, CABAL with 18 and VIVA with 11**. Then there will be a large number of small parties. This is positive because Semilla will have more interlocutors to build agreements, but it will also have a negative aspect by increasing the amount of negotiations necessary with multiple parties to consolidate support to the government.

## Political key leaders

In a Congress where the need to **both build consensus and bridges will be crucial, the identification of key articulators is essential**. Below, we present three of the most important names to be taken into account in the new conformation of the Legislative Branch:



**Shirley Rivera.** She is the current president of the Guatemalan Congress, in office since 2022. She belongs to the Vamos party, the now ruling party. She is one of the most trusted people in the political circle of the party of which the president, Alejandro Giammattei, is a member. The Vamos party will be the most represented political force in Congress 2024-2028.

**Samuel Pérez.** He has been a deputy for the Movimiento Semilla since 2020 as part of the opposition. He was the first Secretary General of the party from 2019 to 2022. He was re-elected as deputy for Congress heading the list of his party, which strongly increased its number of seats in these elections. He is expected to be Arevalo's key player in the Legislative Branch.



**Francisco Vitelio Lam.** He has extensive experience in the Legislative Branch, having been re-elected as deputy for the Congress heading the list of UNE, party to which Sandra Torres belongs. Thus, he will be the strong man of this legislative bench, being the central key to unlock any possible endorsement of his space to each legislative initiative.

## And now?



After his victory on Sunday, **Bernardo Arévalo will take office on January 14, 2024**, the same date on which the elected Congress will begin its annual session. The incumbent president, Alejandro Giammattei, congratulated the new president and invited him to make an "orderly transition the day after the results are officialized".

However, such **transition might not be so easy**. On the one hand, the UNE party issued, once the results were known, a press release in which it questions the vote count and where it states that "it will set its position when the results are clarified with total transparency". **Although the distance between the candidates and the lack of general complaints regarding the process suggest that UNE will finally accept defeat**, this position is indicative of the challenges that Guatemalan democracy will face in the coming months.

However, the **biggest hurdle could come from the third branch of government in discord: the Judicial Branch**. Before the election, prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, head of the FECI and involved in the investigative actions against Semilla, stated that the **party could be suspended and that he was considering issuing arrest warrants for some of its members**.

So, after winning the election, **the uncertainty now moves to the open ended judicial political fight that Arévalo will have to face**. Days and time will tell if the legitimacy obtained yesterday at the polls will be enough to deter the part of the Judiciary that has tried to undermine Arevalo's arrival to the National Palace.



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