

August 2023



DIRECTORIO LEGISLATIVO | FORTALECEMOS LAS DEMOCRACIAS DE AMÉRICA LATINA

Guatemala's presidential run-off

Pre-electoral report



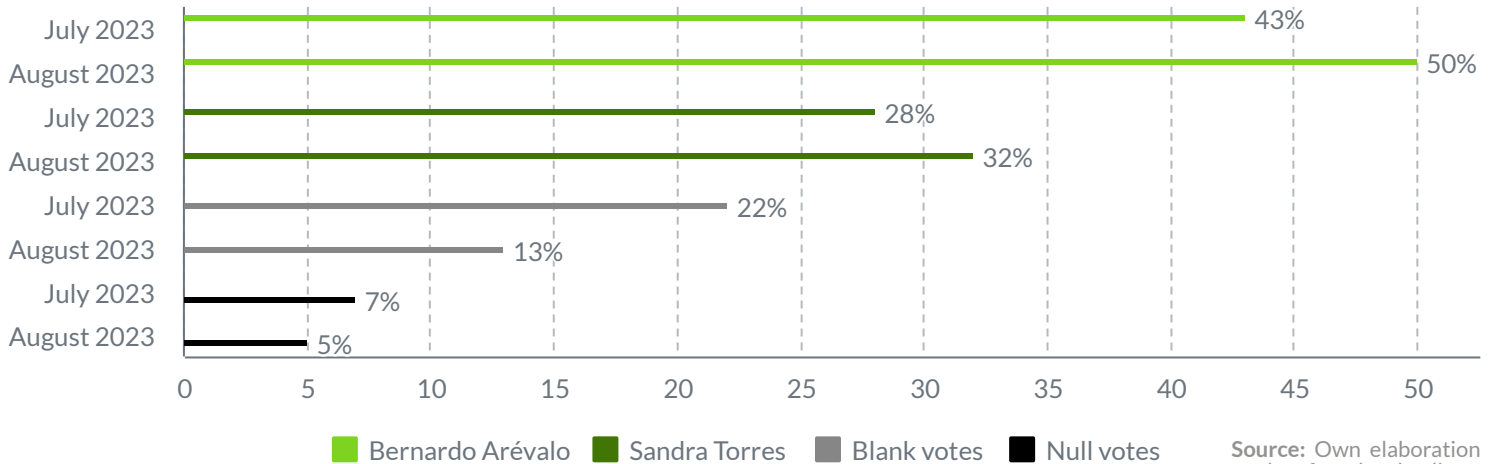
What are the key takeaways of the report?

- 1 On August 20, Guatemala will vote in a run-off election to define the next president. **Sandra Torres (UNE) and Bernardo Arévalo (Movimiento Semilla)** will compete to succeed Alejandro Giammattei for the 2024-2028 term.
- 2 **Uncertainty is the frame of the election. In the first round, the null and blank vote was the most popular option. Whoever wants to win the presidency will have to conquer this electorate.**
- 3 According to local polls, **Bernardo Arévalo leads Sandra Torres by more than 15 points.** Surprises are not discarded due to the high rate of undecided votes and the lack of reliability that polls have shown in the past.
- 4 The road to the run-off went through a series of obstacles. Days after the election, the **results were suspended, a recount was carried out and even Semilla's participation was in question**, since a court requested the suspension of the party.
- 5 The Congress with which the **next president will have to work remains fragmented**, and none of the forces has a majority of its own. The construction of agreements will be key to advance in the government plan.

What do polls say?

Arévalo leads the forecasts

Voting intentions



- The few reliable and available polls give a clear advantage to **Arévalo**, unlike in the first round where he was not among the main candidates. His **image has been favored after a criminal court tried to block his participation in the second round** seeking the suspension of the party, in what was known as "judicialization of the election". Arévalo tried to capitalize on the situation in his favor by insisting on his **anti-establishment discourse**.
- Meanwhile, the candidate who received the most votes in the first round, **Sandra Torres**, **held on to her electoral base** by appealing to a more conservative tone in defense of values such as order, family and religion.
- Although **Arévalo is the clear favorite**, as he would be reaching **50% of the votes**, there are still more than 18% of votes that are declared null or blank, which if they all go to Sandra Torres, could lead the election to a virtual tie. The possibility of this happening, in any case, sounds complex, so the candidate of Semilla attends the electoral act with better chances than his competitor.

Candidates 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 the 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 Guatemalan Congress since 2020 and comes to the competition for the Presidency with a reformist discourse against corruption and the political class.

Proposals

- Simplify formalization of employment
- Consolidation of social welfare and protection programs
- Transitioning to an economy based on regenerative, clean and circular production
- Strengthening of security institutions
- Creation of a state-owned company with a network of public pharmacies
- Creation of the National Anticorruption System

To access his government plan [click here](#)

Sandra Torres

Profile

Torres has a degree in communications. She founded the UNE party in 2003. This is her third run for the presidency, having lost in the 2015 and 2019 elections. After her last candidacy, she was accused of illegal financing during the 2015 elections, for which she spent some time in prison.



Torres defines herself as a social democrat for her priority to social programs, but her discourse is within a more conservative spectrum.

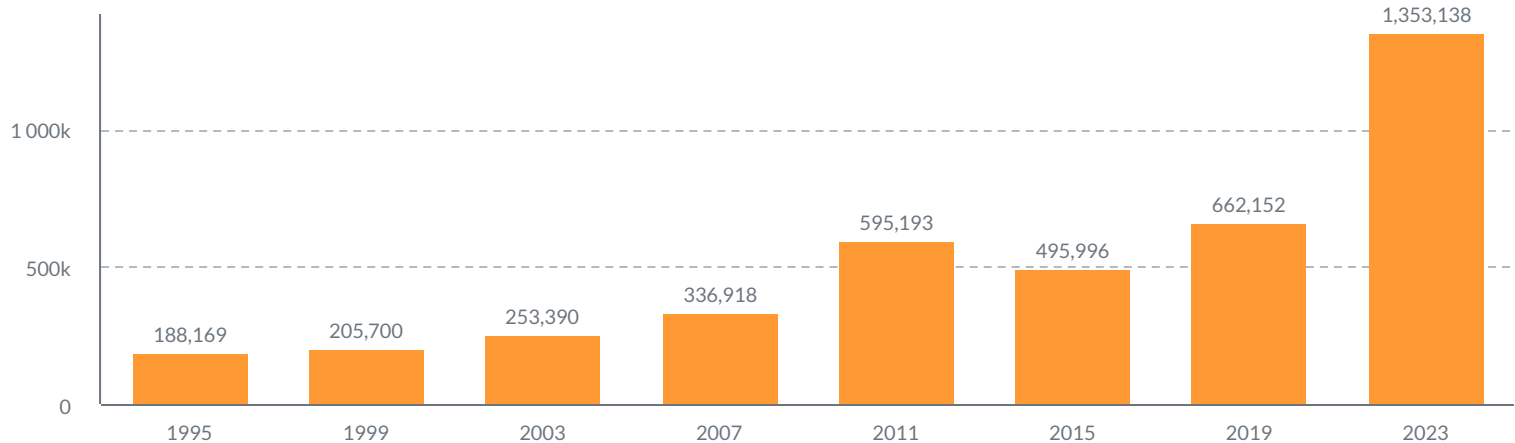
Proposals

- Eliminate VAT on basic basket products
- Implementing an Easter bonus for public and private workers
- Revise Income Tax to make it deductible
- Militarization and intervention of prisons
- Standardize registries and reduce drug prices
- Zero tolerance policy for corruption
- Implementing an open and digital government

To access her government plan [click here](#)

Rise of the "protest vote" and the challenge of engaging the population

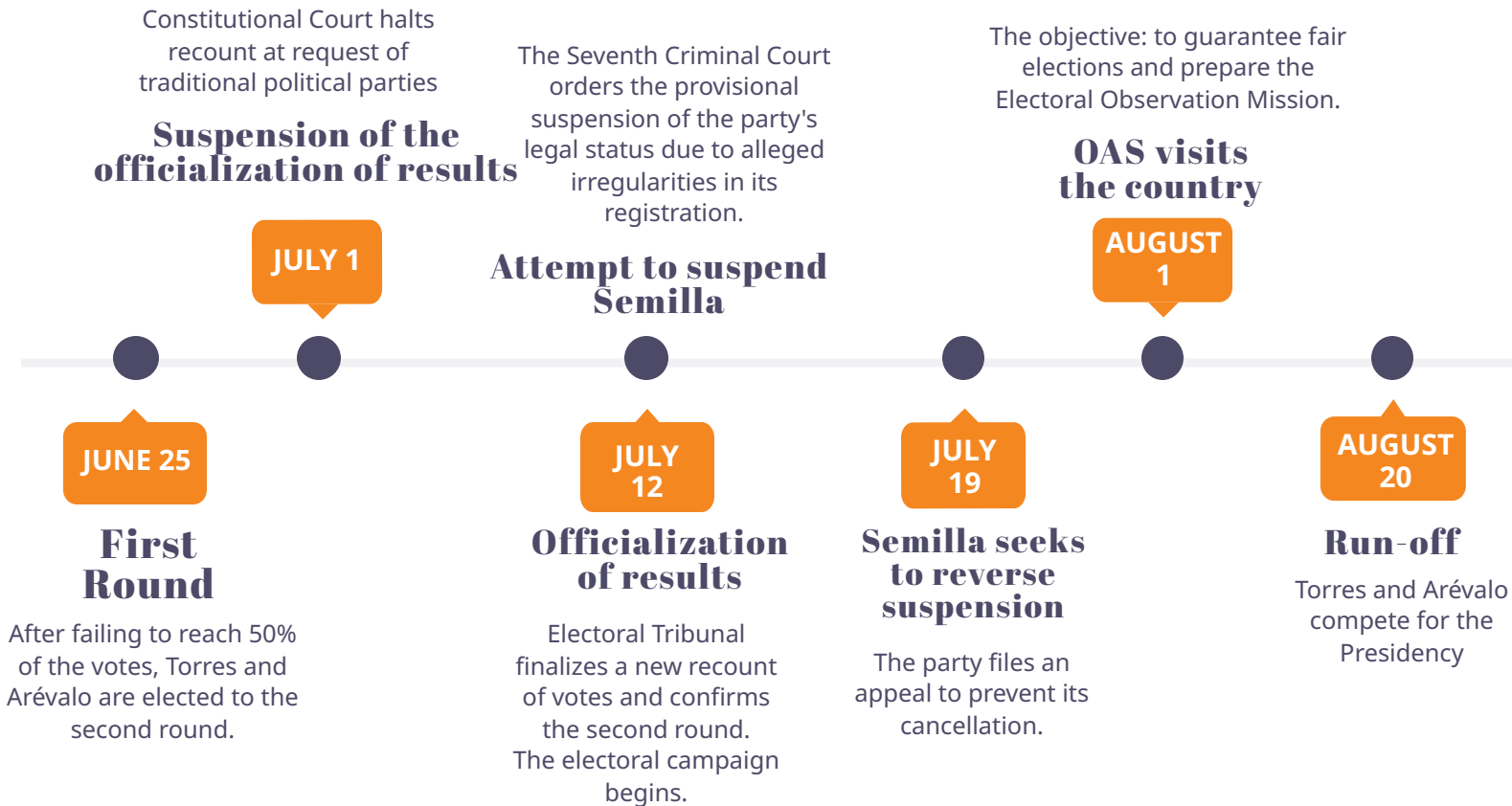
Blank and Null Votes



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

- The big winner of the first round was the **"protest vote" (composed of null and blank votes)**, which exceeded more than 24%, and which was much higher than in previous elections. Neither Torres nor Arévalo reached even 20%.
- This can be understood, in the first place, by the **disenchantment with the traditional political class**, involved in **allegations of corruption** and that has failed to provide concrete solutions to the main problems of the country, as well as by the lack of an electoral offer that calls citizens to go to the polls. A second factor is that **the candidates who were suspended by the electoral justice system from participating in the first round promoted the annulment of the vote in protest.**
- Thus, winning these votes will be **key to tip the balance and win the Presidency.** The great challenge will be to motivate a citizenry that does not trust their parties or their political institutions, and thus capitalize on the votes in their favor.

How did we get to the run-off?



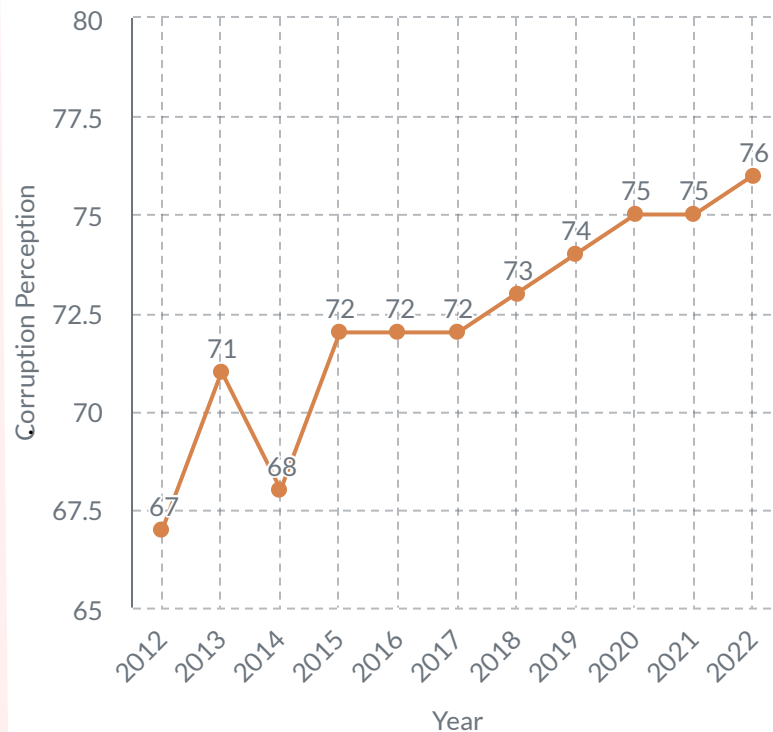
Corruption as a central concern of the citizenship

Corruption is one of the main concerns of the population. Although the arrival of the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity (CICIG, in Spanish) helped improve the figures after dismantling bribery and illicit financing networks, a series of recent events have once again raised suspicions about the country's political class.

Among them, the following stand out:

- The resignation of then President Otto Pérez Molina in 2015, after being implicated in acts of illicit association, for which he was subsequently convicted.
- Starting in 2016, after Jimmy Morales became president, new corruption investigations were launched against officials of his government, including himself. The effort to prevent their progress by politicians, businessmen and military was known as the "Pact of Corrupts", which sought to guarantee their impunity.
- In 2019, the decision not to renew the stay of CICIG in the country.
- With the leadership of Alejandro Giammattei since 2020, there was no progress in the matter. There were also accusations against him, the return of CICIG was rejected and there was persecution of journalists dedicated to identifying acts of corruption.

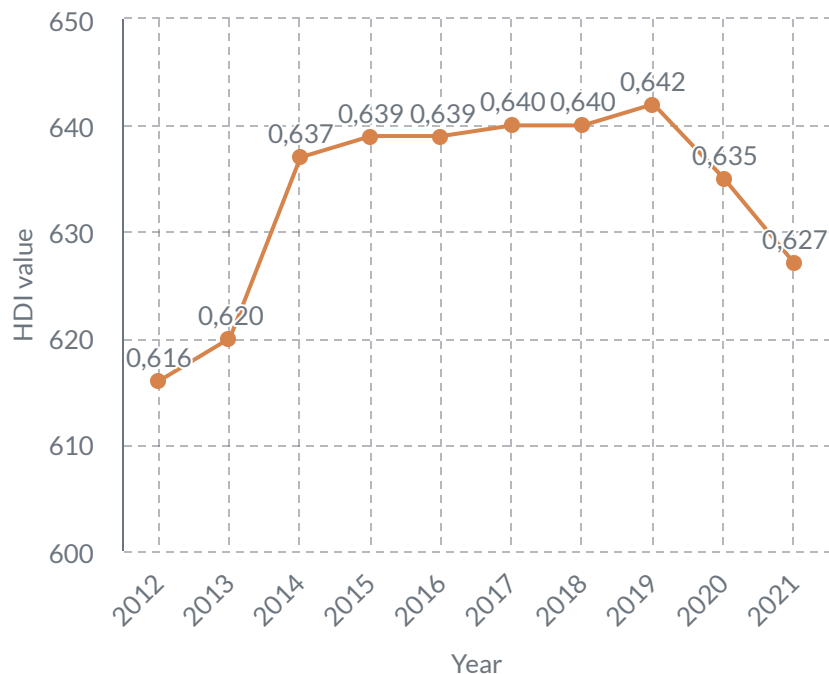
Corruption index



Source: based on data from Transparency International's Public Sector Corruption Perceptions Index.

Economic and social welfare as another central factor

Human Development Index (HDI)



Source: Graph prepared by the authors with data from the United Nations (UN).

The second round will also take place in a fragile economic and social context, where citizens are unable to meet their basic needs. This can be seen in the decline in HDI scores in recent years, which include data on life expectancy, education and access to a decent standard of living.

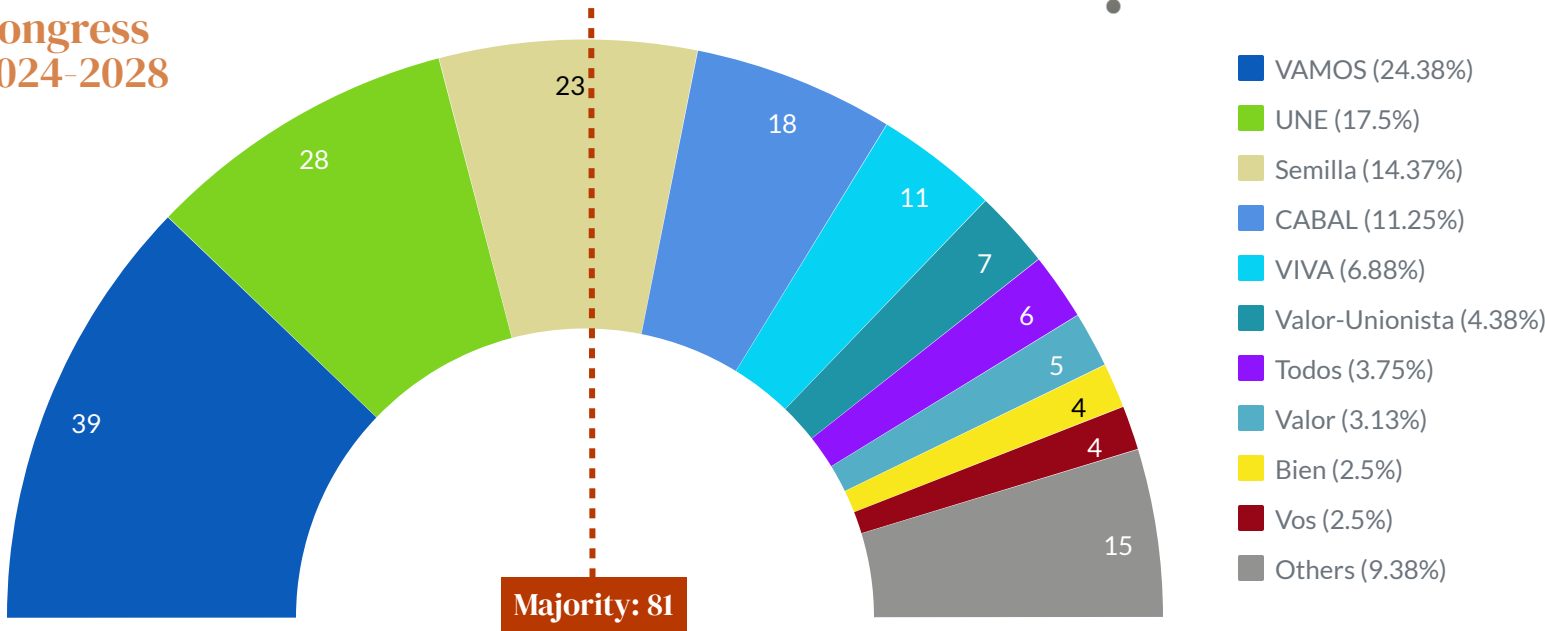
During the administration of Alejandro Giammattei, which began in 2020, a number of factors could explain the decline in the index, which has also had an impact on the image of the president, currently one of the most unpopular in Latin America. Among them are the poor management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the late arrival of vaccines to the population; the increase in child malnutrition (despite the fact that combating it was one of his main promises); and a series of protests faced by his government after it tried to cut spending on health and education, which even led to calls for the president's resignation.

Despite having the highest gross domestic product (GDP) in the Central American region, increasing levels of poverty, malnutrition, high illiteracy rates, and demand for basic services plague a citizenry that finds no solutions from its political class.

Whoever becomes the next president will have to channel the demands and expectations for development and focus on concrete solutions.

Relations with the Legislative Branch

Congress 2024-2028



The most important fact regarding the next legislature is that whoever becomes president will not be able to achieve a simple majority of 81 seats out of a total of 160 in Congress. Once again, a high degree of fragmentation will characterize the legislative branch, so the construction of agreements between forces will be essential for the new government's agenda. However, the cost of this will vary from candidate to candidate.

The three main forces will be the current ruling party (VAMOS) with 39 seats, followed by UNE with 28 - which unlike previous years will no longer be the first force - and Semilla with 23 seats, and a strong increase in its representation compared to the previous legislature.

If this trend is confirmed and Bernardo Arévalo becomes the future president, his government will face an additional challenge. The search for consensus with other forces could be complicated by the ideological distance to traditional and conservative parties such as VAMOS, UNE, Cabal and Valor-Unionista. On the other hand, Torres' party has already cooperated in Congress with VAMOS - the ruling party and now the first force - during the government of current President Alejandro Giammattei, so the dialogue between the two spaces could be more fluid.

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