



GUATEMALA

Capital Guatemala City, 14°38'N 90°30'W

Official languages Spanish, 22 indigenous languages

Government **Presidential republic**
- President Álvaro Colom Caballeros
- Vice President Rafael Espada

Independence
- from Spain September 15, 1821

Political Parties (election results 2007)

Governing party
National Unity of Hope (Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza, UNE) 48

Opposition parties

Grand National Alliance (Gran Alianza Nacional, GANA) 37
Patriotic Party (Partido Patriota, PP) 30
Guatemalan Republican Front (Frente Republicano Guatemalteco, FRG) 15
Encounter for Guatemala (Encuentro por Guatemala, EG) 4
Unionist Party (Partido Unionista, PU) 8
Social Action Centre (Centro de Acción Social, CASA) 5
National Advancement Party (Partido de Avanzada Nacional, PAN) 4
Nationalist Change Union (Unión del Cambio Nacionalista, UCN) 4
Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity – MAIZE (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca – MAIZ, URNG – MAIZ) 2
Democratic Union (Unión Democrática, UD) 1

Total: 158

State of Democracy Guatemala

Guatemala is a positive example of a post-conflict society where democracy is taking root. Free and fair elections have been held for more than twenty years. The electoral system has shaped political pluralism and a multiparty legislature. The most recent elections in 2007 resulted in a minority government. The governing party, Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), has only 48 of the 158 seats in Congress.

Polarization

The first years of the current government were marked by a firm opposition of Partido Patriota, the third largest party in Congress, with 30 seats. Democracy was tested when lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg was murdered, accusing, in a video published after his death, involvement of the president in a corruption scandal. Thankfully, most political parties reacted cautiously and agreed on an institutional solution. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) was appointed to start an investigation into the matter.

CICIG

Founded in 2007, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) is the result of a United Nations initiative to help Guatemala address the ineffectiveness of the judicial system to deal with the high level of violence in the country. The mandate of CICIG was extended in 2009 as it is considered to be of vital importance to cope with impunity and security in Guatemala.

Political Alliances

Forming alliances in Congress is essential for UNE's minority government to achieve agreement on a national agenda and have policies approved. In 2009 UNE has managed to form such alliances and pass important legislation. More than two thirds of Congress members have backed the government on new security laws and approved loans that are necessary to fund the budget.

Public funds

The government of Guatemala lacks public funds to provide for the basic needs of all citizens. Although Guatemala has considerably progressed in the past years according the development indicators, it has grown much slower than other countries in Latin America. Guatemala suffers from structural economic inequalities, which have been aggravated by the financial crisis. In 2009 the government proposed a modest change in tax legislation to raise revenues for a firmer investment in healthcare, education and security. So far, the bill has not passed Congress.

Social Economic Council

Guatemala is going through the most dramatic drought in the past thirty years. This has led to a mayor food crisis. The government has not been able to manage this crisis in a satisfactory manner, lacking (financial) capacity to do so. To discuss and address the causes of such crises with support of the main economic, social and political actors, an important step has been made to establish a Social Economic Council (SEC) in Guatemala.

NIMD Guatemala Programme

Multiparty Dialogue

In the current political climate, the NIMD programme in Guatemala has been working on the reduction of polarization through the Forum of Political Parties (FPP). Set up in 2002, the FPP is a permanent platform for multiparty dialogue. The Forum promotes the Shared National Agenda (SNA), a reform agenda endorsed in 2003 by all political parties. The FPP provides a platform for political actors to meet and prepare legislation on issues such as security, women, regional integration, youth and indigenous peoples. One of the results for instance has been a firm increase in local politicians from indigenous backgrounds. Working together through democratic dialogue contributes to a better understanding of differences, which helps in reaching consensus.

Changes in legislation

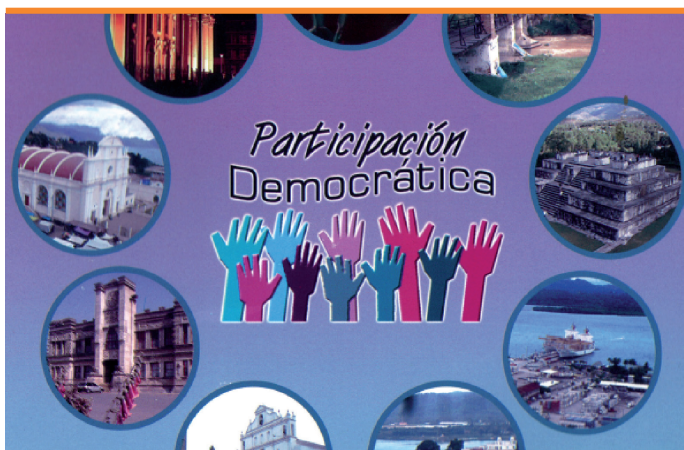
Examples of legislative reform that NIMD supports include a draft bill that seeks to make floor crossing more difficult, and legislation that aims to make political parties less dependent on financial supporter by individuals who may request political favours in return.

Social Economic Council

For almost five years now, NIMD has been facilitating a process that brings together leaders from different sectors in order to create a Social Economic Council (SEC) for Guatemala. The economic crisis has made the establishment of this council more urgent. In 2009 a "founders group" (Grupo Promotor) was formed. Entrepreneurs, labour unions and cooperations are represented in this group. President Alvaro Colom supports the principle of creating the SEC.

Local Level

Governance at the municipal level is another focus area of NIMD's programme in Guatemala. In 27 municipalities throughout the country civil society organizations and local representatives of political parties have worked together on Shared Municipal Agendas (SMAs) for the development of their municipality. NIMD and its partners – Acción Ciudadana, Guatemala's Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and the Italian aid agency Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) – seek to help municipal governments improve the management of public funds and services, and make them more accountable to their residents. In Guatemala such cooperation is a novelty. The SMAs changed the perception of all actors involved, providing hope for a strong decentralized system of governance. In addition, the programme enhanced the link between local party members and the national representatives in Congress, contributing to the consolidation of political parties as truly national parties.



In Guatemala NIMD supports a programme that engages local politicians and citizens' groups in an effort to devise a Shared Municipal Agenda: a joint plan for the development of their municipality. The programme has contributed to a reduction of conflicts between political parties and civil society as politicians and citizens learned to work together on the future of their community.

Stakeholders

1. Programme partner
NIMD Fieldoffice

2. National partners
Universidad San Carlos – Legis – Accion Ciudadana

3. International partners

German Foundations – Organisation of American States (OAS) – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) – Stichting Nederlandse Vereniging (SNV)