

## Political Developments

### *National Identification Card Process*

On July 25, hundreds of young Nicaraguans demonstrated outside the main offices of the Supreme Electoral Council (*Consejo Supremo Electoral*, CSE) in protest of the CSE's perceived failure to efficiently produce and distribute voter identification cards. Nicaraguans over the age of 16 are eligible to vote but cannot do so without a national identification card. The protest was organized by the advocacy group Movement for Nicaragua (*Movimiento por Nicaragua*, MpN), which estimates that over 800,000 Nicaraguan citizens, the majority of whom are youth, still lack ID cards and will be unable to vote in the upcoming November 5 elections. For its part, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (*Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada*, COSEP) offered to help the CSE in a campaign to encourage youth to apply for an ID card by the August 6 deadline. President Enrique Bolaños joined the calls for expediting the production and distribution of national identification cards and submitted to the National Assembly an initiative to extend the ID application deadline.<sup>1</sup>

In response, the CSE accused MpN, COSEP and the government of carrying out a campaign to discredit the electoral authority and rejected the accusation that national identification cards are being selectively processed.<sup>2</sup> CSE President Roberto Rivas challenged MpN to disclose its sources and bring to the CSE offices the thousands of youth who are without national identification cards. According to CSE officials working in Municipal Electoral Council (*Consejo Electoral Municipal*, CEM) offices across the country, the offices are staying open extra hours as well as during the weekends to give citizens the chance to hand in any last minute ID card applications.

### *Electoral Observation*

During a visit to Nicaragua the first week of July, former US President Jimmy Carter informed the CSE about concerns expressed by the different political parties and civil society representatives regarding the national identification card process, voter registry, the application of Election Law Articles 41 and 116<sup>3</sup> and irregularities in the Granada 2004 municipal election.<sup>4</sup> President Carter commended the CSE for committing to provide unlimited access to international and national observers and to apply Articles 41 and 116 and other measures to help minimize problems with the voter registry. He also made recommendations on: expediting the production and distribution of national identification cards; making IDs available free of charge; and clarifying the electoral regulations in a timely manner, among other issues.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, on August 1, former Bolivian Foreign Minister Gustavo Fernández released a report on behalf of the OAS Electoral

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<sup>1</sup> On August 2, the National Assembly unanimously approved a 15-day extension of the national identification card application deadline, from August 6 to 21.

<sup>2</sup> "El Cosep Apoyará la Cedulación," *La Prensa*, July 31, 2006; "Confabulación con las Cédulas," *El Nuevo Diario*, July 27, 2006; "Crece Presión por Cédulas," *El Nuevo Diario*, July 26, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> These articles establish the right to vote of citizens whose names do not appear on the voters' list but who have a valid voter identification card.

<sup>4</sup> "Observadores Alertan sobre Impugnaciones," *La Prensa*, July 6, 2006; "Carter se Reunió con Magistrados del CSE," *Bolsa de Noticias*, July 5, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> "Declaración del ex Presidente de los Estados Unidos, Jimmy Carter, sobre su visita a Nicaragua," The Carter Center, July 6, 2006.

Observation Mission in Nicaragua, in which he also referred specifically to “the conflict between branches of government, the partisan composition of electoral bodies, an imprecise electoral law, an electoral registry with deficiencies, and a slow and inappropriate voter registration process”, as well as operational and logistical limitations derived from a polarized and confrontational political tradition.<sup>6</sup>

CSE President Rivas attended the July 19 Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, during which Sandinista National Liberation Front’s (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN) presidential candidate Daniel Ortega criticized electoral observers, naming the OAS, the Carter Center and Mexico’s Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, IFE). Referencing Ortega’s criticisms of electoral observation,<sup>7</sup> Movement for Sandinista Renovation’s (*Movimiento para la Renovación Sandinista*, MRS) presidential candidate Edmundo Jarquín stated that electoral observers in Nicaragua have long served as a guarantee of electoral credibility. Jarquín also mentioned the Electoral Council of Latin American Experts (*Consejo de Expertos Electorales Latinoamericanos*, CEELA), characterizing it as a partisan group financed by Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez.<sup>8</sup>

### **Public Opinion Polls**

A poll conducted by *Borge & Asociados* just before the death of former MRS candidate Herty Lewites showed Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega ahead in the race with support from 30.1 percent of those polled, followed by Eduardo Montealegre of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (*Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense*, ALN) with 24.4 percent, José Rizo of the Liberal Constitutional Party (*Partido Liberal Constitucional*, PLC) with 21.6 percent, and the late Herty Lewites with 17.2 percent. A more recent poll by the same firm still shows Ortega leading with 31.4 percent; however, Montealegre is now polling at 29.1 percent with Rizo and Jarquín trailing behind at approximately 15 percent each. It appears that in the month of July, support for Montealegre increased after the death of Lewites. Nicaraguan analysts have noted that both Ortega and Montealegre are now polling equally well in urban areas; meanwhile, Ortega has a 5 percent advantage over Montealegre in traditionally Sandanista rural areas.<sup>9</sup> Overall, ALN presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre appears to be benefiting from the disaffection of many on the right, polling in the last few months between 22 to 29 percent, compared to Liberal candidate José Rizo’s 13 to 21 percent.

### **Program Activities**

Surveys implemented by NDI’s local partners show that more than a third of Nicaraguans are at risk of being disenfranchised in the November 5 elections, a percentage that could influence the outcome of closely-contested presidential and legislative races. In partnership with Nicaraguan civil society organizations and with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the Royal Embassy of Denmark, NDI is conducting a national election monitoring and voter identification campaign to help safeguard the elections.

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<sup>6</sup> “OAS Receives Pre-electoral Report on Nicaragua”, [http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press\\_releases/E-164](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press_releases/E-164), August 1, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> “Daniel Ortega Cuestiona Observación Electoral,” *El Nuevo Diario*, July 19, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “*Ponen en Duda Discurso de Ortega*,” *El Nuevo Diario*, July 21, 2006; “*OEA Defiende Observación ante las Críticas de Ortega*,” *La Prensa*, July 21, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> “Encuesta Nacional de Opinión Pública: Nicaragua,” Borge y Asociados, July 2006.

## *National Identification Assessment*

NDI continued working with the internationally recognized election observer organization Ethics and Transparency (*Ética y Transparencia*, ET) and a well-respected team of scholars from the Central American University (*Universidad Centroamericana*, UCA) to identify specific problems and propose solutions to the distribution of national identification cards required for voting. On February 28, ET began identifying 537 eligible citizens who did not have a national identification card and who intended to apply for one. Participating citizens were asked to assemble the required documentation and then apply for a national identification card by May 5, 2006. ET coordinators and observers interviewed each applicant to track the progress of their cases over a 90-day period, extending from May 5 to August 3.<sup>10</sup>

This study revealed the scope of the national identification card problem, showing that of the 537 people who applied for national identification cards at the beginning of the study period, only 18.8 percent received their cards within the 90-day period. Of the 332 participants who consistently and actively sought out their national identification cards, returning to their CSE office on average 2.25 times, 101 (30.4 percent) received their identification within the timeframe stipulated by the CSE. That 70 percent of these persistent citizens did not obtain their national identification cards within 90 days points to a serious problem in the administration of national identification card applications and, in particular, processing and distribution problems. The study clearly shows that the fault cannot be attributable to the lack of effort on the part of citizens since many of these applicants made repeated attempts to secure their identification cards. The study cases were checked against the CSE's website list of identification documents ready to be collected, as well as the most recent voter registration list available. ET and UCA will publish their final findings in early August.

## *Citizen Assistance Centers*

NDI is also supporting the efforts of the advocacy group MpN to improve the national identification card process and enable more citizens to participate in the upcoming election. Since February, youth representatives of MpN have assisted citizens in obtaining birth certificates and fulfilling other requirements to obtain a national identification card through Citizen Assistance Centers (CACs), operating in Managua, León, Masaya, Estelí, Chinandega, Granada, and Matagalpa. Separately, MpN has stepped up its national identification card campaign by reaching out to high school students who are interested in voting, but lack the required identification. NDI helped MpN develop a database to track the more than 7,500 cases of citizens provided with birth certificate, legal and/or transportation assistance at the CACs as of July 28 (see table below). MpN expects to complete data entry and present a report on pending national identification card applications to the CSE by mid-August.



Youth citizens visiting CAC, Managua, June

<sup>10</sup> CSE regulations (*Ley de Reforma y Adiciones a la Ley No. 152, Ley de Identificación Ciudadana*, *La Gaceta – Diario Oficial*, 21 09 05, 182) stipulate that citizens can expect to receive their national identification cards 90 days after they apply for them.

**¡Tenés que tener tu cédula!**

Visita los **CAC** CENTRO DE ATENCIÓN CIUDADANA

que ahí encontrarás toda la ayuda que necesites para obtener tu Cédula.

**Esteli:**  
Barrio 14 de abril.  
Portalito 1 cuadra al oeste,  
10 varas al sur.  
Teléfono: 84-93283

**Chinandega:**  
Antigua Gallá y Villa  
95 varas arriba.  
Teléfono: 341-4602

**Río Blanco:**  
Alcaldía 1 ½ c. al este.  
Frente, Edén de la Novia.  
Teléfono: 69-97331

**León:**  
Del Hotel El Convento  
½ cuadra al norte.  
Teléfono: 311-4600

**Matagalpa:**  
Texaco Central 2 ½  
cuadros al este,  
mano derecha # 117  
Teléfono: 61-87553

**Managua:**  
Del Zumen 1 ½ al lago  
(Fte. A Fotos Tono)  
Teléfono: 254-4378

**Masaya:**  
De la Cerroca 1 c. al sur,  
10 varas al este.  
Teléfono: 69-28303

**Granada:**  
Parte trasera del edificio Tropigas,  
frente al mercado central  
Teléfono: 87-45483

Para cualquier consulta sobre cedulación y verificación  
llamar al **1-800-1273**

**¡Tu Cédula te da Identidad!**  
**¡Tu VOTO te da PODER!**

Administración por Nicaragua

MpN flier indicating CAC locations, July 2006

***Election Observation and Quick Count***

NDI is providing quick count technical assistance to ET for the November 5, 2006 presidential race. A quick count is a well-tested and reliable methodology for systematically evaluating the quality of the administration of the election processes throughout the country on election day and providing an accurate, timely and independent confirmation of the vote count on election night. To date, ET has recruited approximately 10,000 volunteer observers. In addition to conducting a quick count of the presidential election, these volunteers will provide qualitative information on legislative races and conduct an analysis of the legal challenges submitted to the CSE at the polling station, municipal and department levels. Additionally, ET has moved their technical team into what will be their observation headquarters on election day, and is on schedule with preparations for communications lines, the acquisition of hardware, back-up power capacity, etc.