

Political Developments

National Identification Card Process

Movement for Nicaragua (*Movimiento por Nicaragua*, MpN) called on the Supreme Electoral Council (*Consejo Supremo Electoral*, CSE) to expedite the production and distribution of national identification cards. On August 2, largely in response to growing citizen pressure, the National Assembly unanimously approved President Enrique Bolaños' proposal to extend the deadline for citizens to apply for their national identification cards from August 6 to August 21. Bolaños' proposal was presented to the legislature on July 31 after MpN and the Institute for Development and Democracy (*Instituto para el Desarrollo y la Democracia*, IPADE) announced that, according to their estimations, approximately 800,000 Nicaraguans over the age of 16 did not have a national identification card. In response, CSE President Roberto Rivas said that while the extension of the identification card application period would cause disruption to the electoral calendar and the electoral process as a whole, the CSE would abide by the legislation. According to the CSE, around 20,000 citizens applied for national identification cards during the extended application period.¹

At a press conference on August 17, Ethics and Transparency (*Ética y Transparencia*, ET) published the results of its national identification card assessment, highlighting serious problems in the administration of national identification card applications and, in particular, their processing and distribution.² Approximately 140,000 applications for national identification cards must be processed by the CSE deadline of September 5 and 400,000 national identification cards or supplementary voting documents must be distributed in time for the November 5 election.

Electoral Observation

On August 18, the official electoral campaign period began for the November 5 national elections with a CSE event in Managua. The event was attended by representatives of the five registered political parties and alliances, as well as representatives of the national police, the armed forces, national and international electoral observer organizations and the media. In his speech, Rivas criticized the "few international electoral observation organizations that attempt to discredit the Nicaraguan electoral process." This remark came after Gustavo Fernández, head of the Organization of American State's (OAS) electoral observation mission, presented a pre-election report that referred to the partisan composition of electoral bodies and described the national identification card and voter registration processes as "inappropriate and slow."³ Rivas reacted to the OAS report by saying that the report should have been framed "positively." At the event, Rivas went on to say that "we appreciate the help of electoral observers, especially when they act with objectivity" and that "we don't like observers who respond to particular interests, although we allow them to

¹ "Veinte Mil Personas Solicitaron Cédula," *La Prensa*, August 23, 2006.

² "Muy Pocos han Recibido su Cédula," *El Nuevo Diario*, August 18, 2006; "CSE Deficiente con Elaboración de Cédulas," *La Prensa*, August 18, 2006.

³ "OAS Receives Pre-electoral Report on Nicaragua", http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press_releases/.

operate, especially those interested in undermining our electoral process.”⁴

Public Opinion Polls

A poll conducted by *M&R Consultores* between August 4 and 10, showed Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega ahead in the race with support from 32.1 percent of those polled, followed by Eduardo Montealegre of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (*Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense*, ALN) with 25.0 percent, Edmundo Jarquín of the Sandinista Reform Movement (*Movimiento Renovador Sandinista*, MRS) at 19.9 percent, and José Rizo of the Liberal Constitutional Party (*Partido Liberal Constitucional*, PLC) with 13.7 percent. With 8 percent of the population categorized as undecided, some analysts predict a run off election between Ortega and Montealegre that would result in a win for Montealegre.⁵ However, according to CID Gallup’s most recent poll of August 16 – 19, Ortega, who led the poll with 29 percent, could win in the first round of elections on November 5. The CID Gallup poll shows that, when the 19 percent of the undecided is eliminated, Ortega receives more than 35 percent of the voter intention. In second place follows Montealegre with 23 percent of voter preferences.⁶

Program Activities

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 nationwide audit of the electoral registry; overcoming barriers to obtaining national identification cards needed for voting; highlighting irregularities from past elections to prevent these problems from reoccurring; and implementing a quick count of the presidential race and observing legislative races on election day.

National Identification Card Assessment

This month, ET and a well-respected team of scholars from the Central American University (*Universidad Centroamericana*, UCA) completed a national identification card assessment to identify specific problems and propose solutions to delays in the distribution and processing of national identification cards. Based on a nationwide sample of 537 eligible citizens who did not have a national identification card and applied for one, this study tracked applications for a period of 90 days (May 5 to August 3, 2006). This is the timeframe set by the CSE’s own guidelines for citizens to receive identity cards.⁷ Tracking of the sample cases over the 90-day period showed that, on average, only 18.8 percent of applicants received national identification cards. ET emphasized 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. For example, of those applicants who were persistent and

⁴ “*Poder Electoral Reclama a OEA por Informe*,” *La Prensa*, August 22, 2006.

⁵ “*Ortega Está a Una Décima de Ganar*,” *La Prensa*, August 21, 2006.

⁶ “*Ortega ganaría en primera vuelta*,” *La Prensa*, August 29, 2006.

⁷ 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 submit their applications.

consistently visited the CSE office, on average, only 30.4 percent received their identification cards. 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 will continue tracking its cases until election day.

During an August 3-9 visit, NDI technical advisors analyzed the data and worked with ET and UCA to draft a report. At a press conference on August 17, ET released the results of the national identification card assessment. The event was covered by representatives of five television stations, 16 radio stations and the two major national newspapers.⁸ From August 15 to 17, NDI and ET also shared the results with the CSE and political parties, as well as representatives of the Carter Center, the European Union, the OAS, USAID, and the embassies of Denmark and the United States.

Citizen Assistance Centers

NDI is 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 through Citizen Assistance Centers (CACs) operating in eight departments: Chinandega, Estelí, Granada, León, Managua, Masaya, Matagalpa and Río Blanco. NDI helped MpN develop a database to track the approximately 10,000 cases of citizens provided with legal advice, information on applying for birth certificates and national identification cards or assistance with photographs necessary for identity cards. On August 24, MpN issued a preliminary report on its national identification card assistance and called on the CSE to focus on distributing national identification cards already produced, referencing problems with slow production and distribution of identity cards as reported in ET's study.⁹ MpN is developing a report on the number of citizens it has assisted through the CACs who have applied for and obtained national identification cards. The group plans to continue tracking its cases until election day.

Lima Accord Forum

On August 15, ET hosted an election conference and a meeting of the Lima Accord, (*Acuerdo de Lima*), a regional network of 18 domestic monitoring groups from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean that NDI co-founded and of which ET is a member.¹⁰ At the conference, entitled "Electoral Trends in Latin America: Close Elections and Challenges," Percy Medina of Transparency in Peru and Silvia Alonso of Civic Alliance in Mexico shared experiences with observing elections in their own countries, emphasizing the importance of the capacity of national electoral observation groups to speak to the legitimacy of electoral processes. During the conference, ET Director Roberto Courtney called on political parties to refrain from making pronouncements regarding results on election day, particularly if the races are close.¹¹ At a separate event in which the regional network transferred the presidency of the

⁸ "CSE Deficiente con Elaboración de Cédulas," *La Prensa*, August 18, 2006; "Muy Pocos han Recibido su Cédula," *El Nuevo Diario*, August 18, 2006.

⁹ "Movimiento por Nicaragua vio positiva extensión del plazo," *El Nuevo Diario*, August 25, 2006.

¹⁰ The Lima Accord network was created as a result of a meeting of Latin American election observation groups in Lima. The meeting was hosted by NDI partner organization Transparency (*Transparencia*) in Peru. NDI provided support for the meeting and the network through the Civic Network program, funded by the NED.

¹¹ "Llaman a Esperar Resultados," *La Prensa*, August 18, 2006.

Lima Accord to ET, Lima Accord members urged the CSE to process observer credentials in a timely manner and provide unfettered access to all electoral processes.¹²



ET recognizes international donors at Lima Accord presidency transfer event, August 15, 2006.



ET departmental coordinators attend the Lima Accord conference, August 15, 2006.

Election Observation

Following the Lima Accord events, ET celebrated its Tenth Anniversary by recognizing eight members of the board of directors, 17 departmental coordinators from across the country and 300 volunteers who have served as volunteer election observers since the 1996 national elections. At this event, NDI President Ken Wollack recognized the decade of partnership between NDI and ET and the critical nature of the upcoming November election. He also emphasized the importance of national electoral observation world-wide.



NDI President Ken Wollack discusses the decade of partnership between NDI and ET, August 16, 2006.

For these elections, NDI is providing technical assistance to ET on implementing a quick count for the presidential race, observing the legislative races and documenting legal challenges. 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. On August 17 and 18, ET held a retreat, which included: a feedback session on lessons learned from the 2001 quick count experience; development of a master electoral observation calendar; a training session on the final national voter registry audit; and a planning session for observing legal challenges and the distribution of legislative seats. To date, ET has recruited 10,883 volunteer election observers.

¹² "Acuerdo de Lima," *La Prensa*, August 16, 2006; "Si son inocentes que se entreguen voluntariamente," *El Nuevo Diario*, August 16, 2006.