



National Identification Card Assessment 2006 - 2007

ÉTICA Y TRANSPARENCIA XI ANNIVERSARY

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Introduction

In October 2005, Ethics and Transparency (Ética y Transparencia, ET) and the Central American University (Universidad Centroamericana, UCA) issued a comprehensive report, *Democracy and Political Culture in Nicaragua, 2005*. Based on a scientific nationwide survey to identify obstacles to electoral participation, the report revealed a striking finding: half of young citizens who did not vote indicated the reason for their nonparticipation was that they lacked national identification cards.

Two subsequent audits of the national voter registry, implemented in June and October 2006, revealed several additional significant findings: 6.4 percent of citizens were not on the voter list. Only 63 percent of the voter list was completely correct according to both studies.¹ The most important problems included: wrong addresses, citizens out of the country or persons deceased. One in twenty eligible citizens had no voter identification card.

The accumulated systematic evidence from these studies shows that there are significant barriers to citizen participation in Nicaraguan elections. These barriers are particularly imposing for young citizens. This report addresses an important related question: Why do so many citizens not have national identification cards?

The national identification card is a crucial document for Nicaraguan citizens. Citizens need a national identification card to study, to bank, to travel and for legal and employment purposes – and to vote. The Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral, CSE) is responsible for issuing national identification cards, which is linked in turn to both the Central Registry and the Voter Registry. It turns out that a significant proportion of citizens do not have a national identification card. What happens when they apply for one?

This project is designed to provide a systematic answer to that question. Conventional wisdom is that applying for, and getting, a national identification card takes a long time. But, how long does it take? Do some people get their national identification cards more quickly than others? If so, why? To date, we have no systematic answer to these questions.

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1. See *Study of the Voter Registry Audit, National Elections 2006*, Ethics and Transparency, June 2006; and *Second Study of the Voter Registry Audit, National Elections 2006*, Ethics and Transparency, October 2006.

Part One: Project Design

The study was designed in two phases. Phase 1 was undertaken by ET and UCA from February to August, 2006. Phase 2 was implemented by ET, beginning in August 2006 and ending in February 2007.

Phase One

Step 1: A sample of citizens was identified. The unit of analysis was eligible citizens who did not have a national identification card and who intended to apply for one. The working sample size was 537 cases from across the country, stratified by sex (male, female), region and age. And, the sample was purposive: Citizens were selected from departmental centers and neighboring rural areas in each department in the country.

Step 2: The time frame of the study's first phase was set at 90 days. The establishment of this time period is based on the fact that in 162 cases in which national identification card officials set a date to deliver the document, the average timeframe was 90 days. Considering this analysis, it was reasonable to estimate that citizens can expect to receive their national identification cards 90 days after they apply for them.

Each citizen was asked to assemble the required documentation necessary and then to apply for a national identification card by May 5, 2006. ET coordinators and observers interviewed each applicant to track the process of each case over a 90-day period. Specifically, the goal was to determine: How many of these citizens received their national identification cards within 90 days of the application? How many of these citizens did not receive their national identification cards within this period? And for those who did not receive national identification cards, what were the reasons for this?

Step 3: The first phase of study was completed on August 3, 2006. All data collected were entered into the database. The results of the analysis were reported in August 2006.²

2. See National Identification Card Assessment, National Elections 2006, Ethics and Transparency, August 2006.

Phase Two

- Step 1: ET continued to track cases of citizens who were in line applying for national identification cards from May 5, 2006 on.³ Data were gathered from 537 citizens. Twenty-three of those 537 cases were excluded from the analysis because they already had made previous applications, some going back as far as 1987. Since the methodology of the project focuses on the processing of new applications, the effect of keeping these 23 cases in the study would bias the results.⁴ Therefore, the final sample is 514 cases.
- Step 2: This second phase of the voter identification assessment closed February 11, 2007. All data received from ET volunteer coordinators were entered into a database, cleaned, and combined with information from the first phase of the study.
- Step 3: Data Analysis. In this phase, we were interested in the percentage of tracked applicants who received a national identification card before election day, the percentage of the cases who received any voting document (national identification card or supplemental document) before election day and how many cases received a national identification card within the timeframe studied. Finally, how long, on average, does it take for a citizen to receive a national identification card?

3. The data generated come from the observer tracking guide – Annex I.

4. In the report published in August 2006, 101 cases were reported of citizens who received their national identification cards by August 3, 2006. Further analysis done during the project's second phase revealed that 23 of these citizens had, in fact, applied for their national identification cards before the ET/UCA study began. Therefore, a fresh look at the Phase I data indicate that of the 514 cases the percentage receiving their voter identification cards within the 90-day required period was, in fact, 15.2 percent.

Part Two: Findings

The basic aggregate findings from the project are summarized in Table 1. Of the 514 cases tracked over 214 days, 379 citizens (73.7 percent) received a national identification card by election day.⁵ An additional 79 citizens (15.4 percent) got supplemental voting documents which meant that they could vote.⁶ This means that 458 citizens (89.1 percent) were able to vote on November 5, 2006. As a result, 10.9 percent of the citizens tracked by the study were not able to vote in the 2006 national elections.

If we take into consideration the efficiency of the national identification card system to produce and distribute the identification cards, we can conclude that 388 in 514 cases tracked over a period of 214 days (75.5 percent) received a national identification card. The remaining 126 cases (24.5 percent) did not receive their identification cards.

Table 1: Basic Aggregate Findings

Document Received		%	National ID Card +Supplemental	%
National ID Card	379	73.7%	458	89.1%
Supplemental	79	15.4%		
Neither	56	10.9%	56	10.9%
Overall Total	514	100.0%	514	100.0%

5. Nine citizens in the study received their national identification cards after election day.

6. In October 2006, the CSE put into place a system for providing supplemental voting documents to those citizens who had applied for, but not received, their national identification cards. Supplemental voting documents allow a citizen to vote. They have been distributed during the 1996, 2001 and 2006 national elections. This is undertaken as a temporary measure to respond to problems with the issuing and distribution of national identification cards.

The first phase of this project underscored a well-known fact: most citizens apply for a national identification card for various reasons other than voting. Four out of five participants in Phase I of this project cited work, study, legal transactions or travel as their principal reason for applying for a national identification card.⁷

This second phase of the study indicates that approximately more than one in four participants who applied for national identification cards by May 2006 have not received those cards – nine months later – and continue to experience problems with work, study, certain legal transactions, and travel.

For the purpose of this study, a 90-day wait period has been considered to be a reasonable time span to obtain a national identification document despite the legal stipulation that says that in an electoral period, producing and distributing the identification cards should be done in 30 days.⁸ What proportion of applicants received their national identification cards within that required 90-day period? And, are some departments more efficient than others at processing and distributing national identification cards? The answers to those questions are summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

First, of those participants who ended up receiving a national identification card, only 10.9 percent actually received an identification card within 90 days. And more strikingly still, seven departments – Esteli, Leon, Madriz, Masaya, Matagalpa, Nueva Segovia y RAAS – were not able to process and distribute a single application within the 90 day period.

7. See National Identification Card Assessment, National Elections 2006, Ethics and Transparency, August 2006.

8. Article 37 of Law 152, Citizen Identification Law, stipulates that within 90 days prior to election day the CSE will not accept national identification card applications. It also establishes that the CSE will not issue national identification cards within 60 days prior to election day, thus stipulating that the identification cards must be processed within a maximum period of 30 days.

Table 2: National ID Cards Distributed Within 90 Days

Department	Within 90 days	More than 90 days	# of Cases
Boaco	31.3%	68.8%	16
Carazo	21.4%	78.6%	14
Chinandega	8.6%	91.4%	35
Chontales	5.9%	94.1%	17
Estelí	0.0%	100.0%	21
Granada	15.4%	84.6%	13
Jinotega	24.0%	76.0%	25
León	0.0%	100.0%	15
Madriz	0.0%	100.0%	10
Managua	14.1%	85.9%	78
Masaya	0.0%	100.0%	21
Matagalpa	0.0%	100.0%	19
Nueva Segovia	0.0%	100.0%	6
RAAN	7.7%	92.3%	13
RAAS	0.0%	100.0%	7
Río San Juan	16.7%	83.3%	6
Rivas	40.0%	60.0%	5
Total	10.9%	89.1%	321 ⁹

9. In order to calculate the time used to distribute the identification cards, we excluded 58 cases in which only the receipt of the document was reported with no date of delivery recorded. Therefore, the total number of cases used to calculate average time is 321.

Leaving aside for the moment the cases of those citizens who never received a national identification card at all, how long a period, on average, did citizens have to wait to obtain their national identification cards?

The systematic data (See Table 3) indicate that, on average, citizens who actually received national identification cards had to wait 155 days. Not surprisingly, there is evidence of significant variations across different departments.

Table 3: Average Time to Produce National ID Cards, by Department

Department	National ID Cards Distributed	Average time of distribution (days)
Boaco	16	171.1
Carazo	14	135.4
Chinandega	35	140.5
Chontales	17	139.4
Estelí	21	151.9
Granada	13	118.9
Jinotega	25	145.0
León	15	163.0
Madriz	10	181.6
Managua	78	153.8
Masaya	21	171.6
Matagalpa	19	210.8
Nueva Segovia	6	174.0
RAAN	13	155.0
RAAS	7	182.0
Río San Juan	6	111.7
Rivas	5	120.0
Total	321 ¹⁰	155.0

10. Ibid.

The more efficient departments are Rio San Juan and Granada whose applicants waited, on average, 111 and 118 days respectively to receive their national identification cards. In the least efficient departments and regions – Matagalpa, RAAS and Madriz – applicants had to wait 210 days, 180 days and 181 days respectively. Those six-month wait times are more than twice the length of the time anticipated by this study. Notice that the wait time in the most efficient departments is substantially longer than the 90-day period.

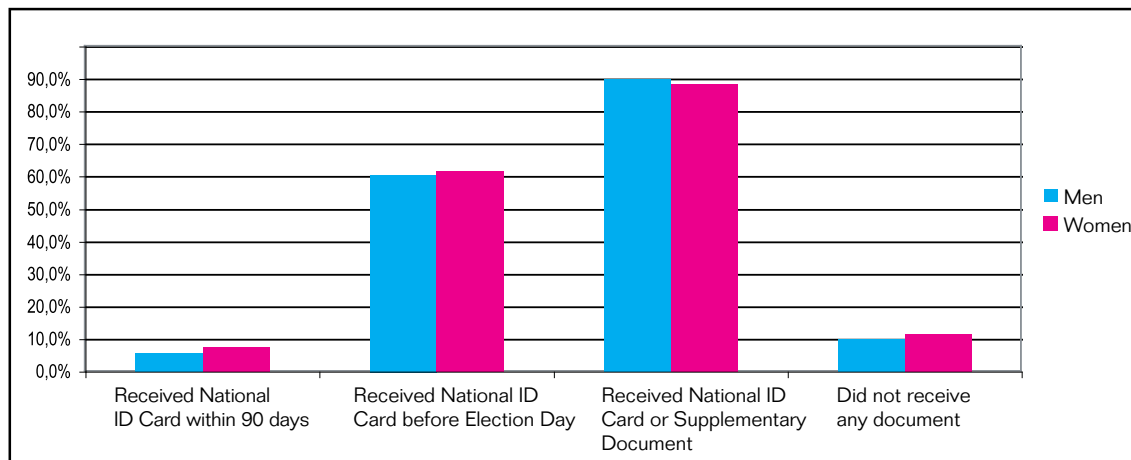
The public release of the results of Phase One of this project alerted people to the problems in the processing and distribution of national identification card applications and prompted citizen groups, along with political parties, to try to resolve the problems. Groups like Movement for Nicaragua (Movimiento por Nicaragua) offered citizens assistance with the application process. But did that assistance help? Did those citizens who received such assistance actually get their national identification cards any quicker than those who received no help at all? The earlier phase of this study suggests that they do.¹¹

One principle underpinning the work of effective bureaucracies in democratic states is that citizens should all be treated as equals by officials of the state. The systematic data from the project allow us to explore the application of that ethic. In principle, the applications of women, for example, should be treated just as efficiently as those of men when it comes to how state officials deal with their national identification card applications. The applications of young people should be treated no differently than those submitted by older people. And applications from those living in rural and urban areas should be dealt with in the same way.

The hypothesis driving these more detailed investigations is that there should be no difference between men and women, the young and the old, and between rural and urban dwellers when it comes to how the State responds to the applications from these different groups. For the most part, the findings support these hypotheses. As the data in Figure 1 show, there is no gender gap; the probability of men and women getting a national identification card within 90 days, or before election day, is the same. There is nothing in those data to indicate that men, or women, somehow get more favorable treatment.

11. See National Identification Card Assessment, National Elections 2006, Tables 6 and 7, Ethics and Transparency, August 2006.

Figure 1 – A Gender Gap?

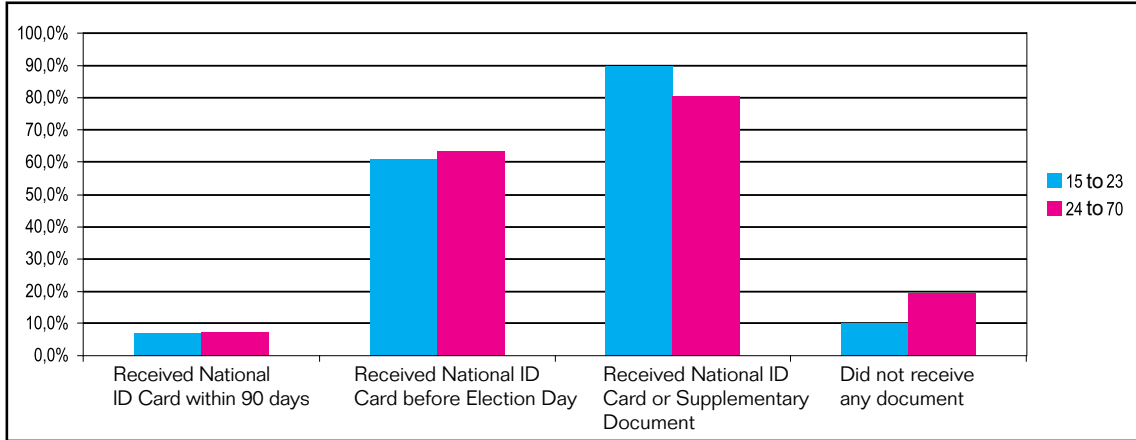


Conventional wisdom has it that older people tend to be more interested in politics than the young; politics is a middle age sport. However, in Nicaragua, the systematic evidence undermines that conventional wisdom. The results of an ET/UCA democracy survey show that Nicaraguan youngsters are more, not less, interested in politics.¹²

Young people are less likely than their older counterparts to have national identification cards, but they should be more motivated to apply for them. The data in Figure 2 show that the probability of the young and older age groups obtaining a national identification card in 90 days, or at least before Election Day, is exactly the same. Significant differences do appear in the other categories. Young people are more likely than their older counterparts to get a vote document (national identification card or supplemental voting document). Older applicants are significantly more likely (19.5 percent) than the young (10 percent) to get no document at all.

¹² See Democracy and Political in Nicaragua 2005, Central American University and Ethics and Transparency, October 2006.

Figure 2 – An Age Gap?



Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the information laid out above, we can reach the following conclusions:

1. There is an efficiency problem with the national identification card system. One out of four citizens monitored in the study has not received their national identification card after 214 days. Although the high percentage of those who did not receive a national identification card, equivalent to 25 percent, is worrisome, what is even more alarming is that these results occurred in an election year, during which the entire CSE structure, down to the municipal level, was operating. This makes one believe that the efficiency of the national identification card process outside of an election period, and with national identification card offices closed, could turn out to be even lower.
2. The efficiency level of the CSE in terms of producing and distributing the national identification cards is extremely poor given the election period, during which any citizen can reasonably expect to receive an identification card within a 90-day wait time. The election officials only resolved 78 of the cases studied, which accounts for 15.2% of the 514 applications.
3. 10.9 percent of the citizens tracked by the study did not receive any identification document that allowed them to vote. Therefore, they were not included on the voter registry list and could not vote in the 2006 presidential and legislative elections.

4. Applying for a national identification card in Nicaragua is, by international standards, an extremely arduous process. The fact that citizens have to wait, on average, some five months after their application to receive a national identification card is an unacceptably long time. (Citizens of Panama and Guatemala, for example, receive national identification cards within two weeks of application, while in El Salvador one can obtain the document within the same day.)
5. Producing supplemental voting documents to enable citizens to vote is a viable short-term solution to an electoral problem. Nevertheless, relying on such short-term solutions in an electoral environment ignores the far more fundamental problem. A national identification card is more than a voting document. Citizens do not apply for national identification card, primarily, for electoral reasons. They need the card to access basic services to which citizens are entitled.

Two recommendations logically emerge from the above information:

1. The CSE should re-engineer the national identification process in order to identify and address challenges that delay, and in some cases impede, the production and distribution of national identification cards to citizens. These measures should guarantee the removal of obstacles and shorten the wait time for identification cards. The focus of the re-engineering should be on alternative, viable measures for receiving applications at the beginning of the process at the municipal level, particularly given the apparent closing of the Municipal Electoral Councils (Consejo Electoral Municipal, CEM).
2. It is time to reform the civil registry system, so as to overcome institutional problems and allow the standardization of the municipal civil registries with the Central Register of Civil Status. The CSE should implement training, technical assistance, maintenance and monitoring in order to guarantee the adequate implementation of the new system.



Estudio del Proceso de Cedulación
GUIA DE SEGUIMIENTO

No Caso: _____

1. Nombres y Apellidos del Caso: _____
1er. Nombre 2do. Nombre 1er. Apellido 2do. Apellido

2. Fecha de visita: Día _____ Mes _____ Año _____

3. Departamento: _____ 4. Municipio: _____

5. ¿Le entregaron su Cédula o Documento Supletorio?

a. ___ Si b. ___ No

6. Si es SI, ¿cual es el número?

No. Cédula	Documento Supletorio

7. ¿En que fecha la \ lo recibió?

Día Mes Año

8. ¿Recibe apoyo de algún organismo, funcionario del CSE, Partido Político, otro?

a. ___ Si b. ___ No (Fin de entrevista)

9. Si la respuesta es "Si", ¿Diga Cual de Ellos?

- a) ___ Organismo
- b) ___ Funcionario del CSE
- c) ___ Partidos Políticos
- d) _____ Otros (ESPECIFIQUE)

Nombre de encuestador: _____

Revisado por: _____

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The Civic Group Ethics and Transparency, Transparency International's (TI) National Chapter in Nicaragua, is a nonprofit organization. EyT was founded in 1996 to contribute to building a more democratic and developed Nicaragua by strengthening institutions, ethics, and transparency. EyT serves as an umbrella for 20 human rights, civic watchdog and democracy promotion organizations, and relies on a national network of 12,000 volunteers in the entire country. EyT is considered by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Jimmy Carter as “**one of the best civic groups in the world.**”

El Grupo Cívico Ética y Transparencia, Capítulo Nacional de Transparencia Internacional, es una organización Nicaragüense sin fines de lucro. Fue fundado en 1996 para contribuir a edificar una Nicaragua más democrática y desarrollada, impulsando la institucionalidad, probidad y transparencia. Aglutina 20 organismos nacionales de derechos humanos, vigilancia ciudadana y promoción de la democracia y cuenta con una red nacional de 12,000 voluntarios. En palabras del Premio Nóbel de la Paz, Jimmy Carter “es uno de los mejores organismos cívicos del mundo”.

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