



Promoting Inclusion and Reducing Violence in the Guatemalan Elections

Donor: United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Implementing partners: [International Foundation for Electoral Systems \(IFES\)](#), [International Republican Institute \(IRI\)](#), and the [National Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#) through the [Consortium for Elections and Political Processes Strengthening \(CEPPS\)](#)

Project name: Elections - More Inclusion, Less Violence

USAID County Development Cooperation Strategy Objective: Development Objective One - Greater Security and Justice for Citizens

Project goal: Institutionalize processes to mitigate the risks for political violence and illicit/illegal financing of electoral campaigns

Timeframe: August 16, 2012 to January 31, 2017

Development Challenge and Project Initiative

Since the signing of the 1996 peace accords, Guatemala's political system has continued to face challenges, including state institutions that are unable to effectively respond to citizen security threats due to corruption and impunity. Past elections highlighted the need for reforms to the electoral and political system, as well as increased debate on ways to make the system more transparent, responsive and accountable. These institutional weaknesses were exacerbated by the [2015 political crisis](#) and citizen protests. For reforms to the electoral and political system to be effective, they must be accompanied by increased citizen participation and stronger democratic institutions.

CEPPS seeks to address these challenges by working to help traditionally marginalized sectors of society, such as women, indigenous communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) groups, to monitor and reduce political violence and illicit financing of election campaigns. This includes supporting civil society and government representatives as they pass and implement reforms to the political and electoral system, monitor and react to political violence and illicit campaign financing, and foster greater social inclusion in political processes. The project focused on 2015 elections where voters selected a new president, legislators, and municipal leaders. CEPPS worked with partners in Guatemala City as well as in 20 target municipalities that had experienced high levels of political violence during past elections. Each of the CEPPS partners carried out complementary activities that helped to decrease violence and make the 2015 elections more peaceful. The CEPPS partners are presently working to consolidate these gains for future elections.

Objective 1: Civil society organizations and media are effectively strengthened to prevent electoral violence and monitor campaign spending in targeted areas

During the 2015 electoral process, CEPPS/National Democratic Institute (NDI) supported Guatemalan partners [Acción Ciudadana](#) (AC) and the nine-member [Mirador Electoral](#) coalition in organizing a comprehensive pre-election, election day and post-election observation at the national level and in 92 municipalities. AC and Mirador Electoral observers, including 1,595 election day observers and 785 long-term observers, collected data to provide evidence-based recommendations to highlight issues and improve the transparency and effectiveness of the elections, publicizing their findings to inform the public and working with government officials to find solutions. Anecdotal evidence from the observers indicated that their presence had a deterrent effect on potential perpetrators of violence by ensuring that acts of violence would be reported to authorities and the public. During the first round of voting, AC's [quick](#)

[count](#), or independent statistics-based check on of election results, was crucial to reaffirming the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE) results when they were too close to call on election night. Mirador and AC's observations and quick count contributed to helping prevent additional conflicts, a surge in violence or questions regarding the credibility of the elections.

To increase inclusion in the electoral process, the Mirador Electoral networks included representatives of historically excluded populations. Approximately 40 percent of the observers were indigenous (with a significantly higher percentage in predominantly indigenous communities). More than 50 percent of the networks were women, which is well above global averages in election observation networks. In addition, the majority of the observers were under 30. Citizen engagement, particularly of youth, in the electoral process is fundamental in building a culture of long-term civic engagement. The observation also focused on observing violence against women and LGBTI communities, issues that are often not highly visible or prioritized. CEPPS created a [podcast](#) and CEPPS/NDI published a [series of stories](#) to highlight the personal experiences of the Guatemalan citizen involved in the project. In 2016, CEPPS/NDI is supporting AC and their local partners in implementing a civic monitoring initiative that will monitor the actions of elected officials in six of the target municipalities.

CEPPS/International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Institute of Conflict Transformation for Peace (INTRAPAZ) are conducting a second iteration of the "Culture of Peace" program for civil society organizations to mitigate outbreaks of political and electoral violence. The training program worked with more than 200 community leaders (including 80 women) in 2015. CEPPS/IRI works with more than 20 local civic groups to promote dialogue over violence, alternative dispute resolutions and neighborhood consultations. The program works with youth organizations, women's groups, indigenous peoples and LGBTI communities. In collaboration with the University of San Carlos and Media Laboratory, CEPPS/IRI also works with independent journalists and community media groups to advocate for social inclusion by focusing on enhancing investigative techniques, journalistic professionalism and an understanding of Guatemalan politics. The program, which worked with 30 journalists (including 11 women and one transgender woman) in 2015, is also helping to improve reporting around investigations of elected officials and public institutions, campaign financing and public procurement practices.

Objective 2: Capacity of the TSE to counter political violence and better regulate campaign finance is increased

CEPPS/International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) provided technical assistance to the TSE in three areas during the 2015 electoral process: general planning; implementation of electoral security measures; and campaign finance monitoring and oversight. CEPPS/IFES supported election officials in developing and implementing a comprehensive elections operation plan. CEPPS/IFES supported the production and reproduction of 66,000 pieces of electoral materials, radio and TV spots, including information on the electoral rights of LGBTI communities and people with disabilities. Following the first round of elections, CEPPS/IFES assisted the TSE conducting a general post-elections evaluation plan to make improvements for the run-off election. After the run-off elections, CEPPS/IFES facilitated a strategic planning workshop using the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections ([BRIDGE](#)) methodology to plan a long-term strategy. These efforts contributed to the successful administration of the elections, particularly in the planning and logistic operations of the process down to the polling station level. Both Mirador Electoral and the Organization of American States (OAS) noted improvements in the administration of elections and applauded the coordination of electoral organization and logistics as well as the timely and accurate transmission of preliminary results.

CEPPS/IFES supported the TSE to coordinate electoral security efforts with the Attorney General's Office (MP) and other relevant state institutions by facilitating the work of the Electoral Security Inter-Institutional Coordination Committee. CEPPS/IFES conducted an electoral violence assessment and

updated the electoral conflict risk maps, which were crucial in allowing authorities to plan and maximize resources to mitigate electoral related violence. CEPPS/IFES helped develop and reproduce 16,000 electoral security materials such as protocols, electoral security directories, and informational posters on electoral felonies and crimes for nationwide distribution. Furthermore, a civic education campaign on violence mitigation was launched both at the national level and in five departments. TSE officials from the 22 departments received training in conflict management and resolution. As a result of collaboration under this project, the MP created and is allocating resources for a permanent Electoral Felonies and Crimes Unit, which was previously only operated on a temporary basis during elections.

As the TSE strengthened its resolve to enforce campaign finance regulations, CEPPS/IFES provided technical advice on engaging with other government institutions to gain better access to information to conduct more effective and transparent political party campaign finance oversight. CEPPS/IFES helped the TSE develop and publicize a code of ethics for political parties that promoted peaceful elections and campaign ethics and transparency, which were adopted by 23 of the 26 national-level parties. A similar code of ethics was adopted in 10 municipalities that were identified as high risk for electoral violence. CEPPS/IFES also assisted the TSE in monitoring the media as part of campaign finance oversight, which provided the TSE with reliable data to scrutinize the political parties' campaign spending that resulted in stronger sanctions and temporary suspensions of political parties for the first time. CEPPS/IFES concluded programming in June 2016.

Objective 3: Capacity of the Guatemalan government, Congress, TSE, political parties and civil society to promote and implement key reforms is increased

Since 2012, CEPPS has been providing support to the Guatemalan Congress as they draft and debate legislation aimed at improving the political and electoral system and strengthening the transparency and effectiveness of the legislature. CEPPS/NDI supported the congress as it reformed the Law on Elections and Political Parties (LEPP) to promote a more credible electoral process and a more representative, democratic political party system. In 2015, CEPPS/NDI supported a joint congressional-civil society working group that debated reforms to the LEPP in response to the **political crisis**. CEPPS/IFES provided support to the TSE on its proposal on reforms to the LEPP related to political financing and electoral campaign expenditures oversight and accountability. The ambitious reforms, which ultimately included civil society and TSE input, were passed by Congress in April 2016. After further consultations with civil society, including Mirador Electoral, President Morales signed the reforms into law in May 2016. CEPPS partners are currently supporting the TSE and political parties to develop plans to implement the LEPP reforms. CEPPS/NDI is also currently supporting Congress as it considers another generation of electoral reforms that would address additional citizen concerns that were not included in the recent legislation, such as gender and indigenous parity.

CEPPS also supports Congress in working to make its internal procedures and operation more transparent and effective. In 2016, Congress passed the Organic Law on Congress (LOOL), which governs the chamber's internal functions. These reforms, which CEPPS/NDI provided technical assistance on, reduce the potential for misuse of questioning proceedings, introduce restrictions on party switching, and establish a permanent technical assistance body. The LOOL provides Congress with more streamlined and efficient procedures that will improve the content of legislation and the process for their passage. CEPPS/NDI is currently providing technical assistance on implementing the LOOL as well as: reforming the Nominating Commissions Act to increase transparency and improve the process of nominating and appointing unelected government officials; strengthening the capacity of the Commission on Migrants to effectively draft legislation that responds to the needs of migrants; and strengthening the capacity of legislators to draft legislation on security and justice issues. CEPPS/IRI provides technical assistance to the Commissions on Integrity, Transparency and Human Rights to promote greater citizen engagement in

the legislative process as well as to reform laws related to transparency and accountability. CEPPS/IRI also works with the Congressional Access to Public Information Unit to strengthen their ability to respond efficiently and transparently to citizen requests for access to information.

Objective 4: Cisgender and transgender women political participation is strengthened for the 2015 and future elections

Increasing the number of cisgender and transgender women¹ who participate in the electoral or political process as voters, election officials, observers, civic advocates, political candidates or elected officials contributes to building a more diverse, tolerant and inclusive society that better understands and represents their needs. To address the needs of LGBTI communities, CEPPS conducted a baseline assessment of the barriers to LGBTI political participation and has supported LGBTI organizations to participate in political and electoral processes. CEPPS is partnering with government agencies, such as the National Registry of Persons (RENAP) and election administration authorities, to support efforts to make public services more responsive to the needs of LGBTI communities. CEPPS is also working to build the capacity of LGBTI organizations and help create and strengthen strategic alliances with a variety of actors, including political parties, Congress, government agencies and other civil society organizations.

The CEPPS assessment found that a major barrier to political participation for transgender women is the lack of a personal identification document (DPI) that matches their gender identity. A DPI is required to carry out a range of political activities, including voting and running for office. CEPPS conducted trainings with RENAP personnel responsible for issuing DPIs throughout the country on the legal rights of and non-discrimination against LGBTI communities. In 2016, CEPPS worked with RENAP on institutionalizing the inclusion of LGBTI rights in organizational protocols, which were approved in March. As a result, instructive posters outlining the protocols are being placed in all RENAP offices and staff is being trained on the new protocols and non-discrimination. This step is crucial in institutionalizing efforts to guarantee LGBTI rights within RENAP, an advance that is key for transgender individuals who are often denied the right to an identity document that matches their gender identity.

¹Transgender refers to a person whose self-identity does not conform with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex assigned at birth while cisgender refers to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex.